



## The 3<sup>rd</sup> TaPP Annual Conference 2025

*The Trade & Public Policy (TaPP) Network is the UK's largest network of academic experts on trade policy, with more than 130 members. We connect academic researchers with civil servants, parliamentary researchers, journalists, and others looking for expert input on UK trade policy. Our aim is to increase the breadth and depth of evidence available to policymakers and help inform the public debate.*

**On Friday 13 June 2025, the Trade and Public Policy network convened the 3<sup>rd</sup> TaPP Annual Conference**, bringing together TaPP members, officials from across HMG and devolved governments, parliamentary clerks and researchers, agencies, independent bodies, representatives from foreign governments with an interest in UK trade policy, and civil society organizations, to discuss the latest thematic challenges and opportunities for UK trade policy.

This note summarises the enlightening discussions led by our expert speakers: Ngaire Woods, Graham Floater, Chris Southworth, Tom Goodwin, Ana Peres, Stephanie Rickard, Joost Pauwelyn, Ana Vilela Carvalho, Sally Jones, William Bain, Michael Gasiorek, David Bailey, Anand Menon, Annette Kliemann, Miranda Dawkins, Anton Spisak, Nidhi Mani Tripathi, Zheng Wang, Carlos Lopes, Chris Basiurki, Leoni Law, Ingo Borchert, Karishma Banga, Kelly Widdicks, Maryam Teschke-Panah, Tonia Novitz, Desiree LeClerq, Colin Barker, James Bacchus, Emily Lydgate, Bettina Rudloff, Minister Kyoichiro Kawakami, Aslak Berg, Ignacio Garcia Bercero, Beatrice Kilroy-Nolan, and keynote HE Matthew Wilson. Sessions were chaired by the TaPP Co-Directors, Emily Jones, Gregory Messenger, and Jun Du.<sup>1</sup>

The compilation of this report was thanks to Leah Tillmann-Morris, with support from Athene Richford, Yasin Jelle, and Songruowen Ma.

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this note should not be viewed as an endorsement of, or attributed to, any of the speakers.

## Key takeaways

Three key themes ran through the wide range of topics of discussion. In particular:

1. The global trading system today has few guarantees: it is not possible to rely on China for swathes of critical inputs, or the US for security guarantees without facing significant vulnerabilities or increase risk from coercion or pressure. There was a consensus that **the 'old' system was not coming back**.
2. **Realism and pragmatism** had to be hallmarks of UK approaches to trade policy, recognising both its strengths and weaknesses. The UK makes great contributions to the global trading architecture but was also disproportionately dependent on it.
3. As a middle power, the UK does not have the luxury of 'going it alone' and instead had to weather the storm, **acting responsively and calmly** to changing circumstances, drawing on all of the levers available to it.

# The UK at a Pivotal Moment in Global Trade Relations

*Three key messages:*

1. **The US no longer guarantees stability in global trade**, forcing countries like the UK to reassess their strategic dependencies and diversify partnerships.
2. **The UK must balance** deepening bilateral ties with the US against the need to lead and engage in multilateral systems that support rules-based trade.
3. **To remain influential, the UK must invest** in long-term alliances, institutional capacity, and pragmatic economic diplomacy that connects trade policy to real-world outcomes.

**World trade has been upended.** The world of six months ago is not coming back: the sum total of the executive orders and actions coming out of the US is that no country can depend on the stability that may have been previously taken for granted. And while it is tariffs that get in the news, it is the uncertainty that does most of the damage.

**De-escalation has rightly been a priority.** US businesses are in a tough space, looking to the UK and other countries to present their message, and the International Chambers of Commerce (ICC) is leaning in to support governments create these new and important dialogues. Stabilisation is also needed: from a business point of view, it is about pragmatic progress - making sure supply chains do not fragment.

**In reality, however, the US is only 13% of global trade.** It does not have the ability to dismantle the global trading system itself. The majority of the rest – the 87% - have already made statements to promote the rules-based system. However, there are three key obstacles to collective action: first, the challenge posed when US policy actively undermines broader cooperation; second, the temptation to ‘wait and see,’ which brings comfort but not clarity; and third, the rise of anticipatory compliance, in which countries and businesses pre-emptively sanitise their agendas to avoid US displeasure. Each erodes agency and weakens collective resolve.

**For the UK, this poses both a strategic dilemma and an opportunity.** Senior officials are clear about the importance of the special relationship: trade with the US supports over a million British jobs and is worth hundreds of billions of pounds a year. Indeed, compared to other countries, the UK is overexposed to the US. Thus, it is a relief that there have already been successes; Starmer’s deal with Trump on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May<sup>2</sup>, the first dividend of his government’s approach of positive engagement with the US, includes important wins for digital trade (as well as more widely reported elements such as quotas for the auto industry). It follows decades of successful negotiations for nearly a dozen

---

<sup>2</sup> The US-UK Economic Prosperity Deal (EPD), 8 May 2025. See [UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal \(EPD\) - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/us-uk-economic-prosperity-deal)

Memorandums of Understandings with US states<sup>3</sup>, all of which promise the potential for mutually beneficial investment and trade, if implemented as intended.

**But the UK's strategic position has other strengths too.** It has demonstrated already how it can engage with both China and the US,<sup>4</sup> threading the needle between competing powers. In terms of leverage, the UK has some natural assets: English law is used for contracts that cover significant swathes of global trade, and UK legislation ([Electronic Trade Documents Act 2023](#)) further strengthens its position. Meanwhile, the UK's support at the WTO has been important, not only in driving UK interests and market access wins but also to strengthen relations with allies and other trading partners.

**Indeed, the challenge now is to manage the delicate balance:** between bilateral diplomacy and multilateral coordination, between strategic flexibility and long-term consistency, and between yielding to power and upholding the international rules-based order. There is no denying this tension – for policymakers, an almost daily prisoner's dilemma of UK national interests via the bilateral relationship, versus the collective. So, what should the UK's next steps be? Continued positive bilateral engagement with the US is a necessity. And the UK should remember its strengths alongside its dependencies here – a million Americans rely on UK trade for their jobs, and the UK has sectors which are vital to the US economic ecosystem (e.g. universities). But, the UK can no longer afford to be seen as hardwired to always default to the US (despite joint intelligence and security).

**The UK also needs to direct resources for ferociously building relations with other countries.** There is a role for the strand of British foreign policy that recognises – and fields officials - to uncover and codify universal values, and explain where British values lie. The government recognises this – already demonstrating positive and proactive engagement with other countries (e.g. ongoing negotiations in Switzerland, Gulf states, the EU) and in different channels (e.g. via the G7 and G20) to build new alliances that strengthen the UK's voice around key agendas, such as modernisation and sustainability, and a bolder ambition of trade reform, could be greatly effective.

## The UK at the WTO: Crisis or Opportunity?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. **The WTO struggles** with deep-rooted issues like consensus and capacity, making reform difficult despite universal agreement on its necessity.
2. Post-Brexit, the UK should take a **pragmatic, interest-driven** approach to the WTO, leveraging its position as a middle power.

---

<sup>3</sup> Some ongoing.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., POST, '[The UK and China relationship](#)' (last updated 11 February 2025)

3. The UK can lead by promoting **transparency**, engaging in informal and plurilateral forums, and supporting practical tools to strengthen the WTO system.

**Supporters of the WTO claim that it is not the WTO that has failed members, but a few members that have failed the WTO.** Recent developments in geopolitics – the approaches of Russia, China and the US - have only brought this into starker clarity.

**But the WTO has many challenges that have been well known for a long time.** Consensus issues and capacity issues seem intractable. The paradox that reform of the WTO is a priority of every member – but there is no common ground for how to achieve it. As members drive forward their own pet issues, we can lose sight of the principles that would underpin any possibility of reform. Consensus and binding dispute settlement are at odds; we should remember that no one wants to be beaten with a stick.

**It is time for the UK to navigate the WTO with a renewed sense of purpose and pragmatism.** Post-Brexit, the UK is an influential middle power. And the UK government's focus on growth and trade should mean what happens at the WTO matters more than ever - its collapse could shrink the global economy by 5%. But what should this mean for the UK's next steps? According to some speakers, it means that, rather than treating the WTO as an abstract project, the UK should pursue a clear-eyed, interest-based approach. The starting question is no longer 'What is the WTO for?' but 'What does the UK need from the WTO today?' In this theory, the answer lies more in the technical than in the political.

**Whether technical or political, the WTO's value lies in its three foundational functions.** First, stability - through binding tariffs, Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, and a measure of predictability in an increasingly unstable trade landscape. Second, reciprocity of concessions for mutual market access. While the US administration is often blamed for the breakdown of reciprocity, China's state capitalism and industrial overcapacity have been undermining the logic of symmetrical trade deals for decades. Third, and especially importantly for the UK as a middle power, is the WTO's role as a site for contesting rules, both diplomatically and legally.

**Indeed, the UK should lean into a leadership role at the WTO** – one that has been left open by the US taking such a step back. The UK has a long history as a trading nation and as an open economy. We have also been leaders in issue areas and upholding key values and norms such as transparency: for example, as subsidies have become an increasingly tense and growing flashpoint, 50% of WTO members shirk their requirement to notify (some due to capacity issues, but others by choice). The UK has led transparency in this area with an openly accessible database,<sup>5</sup> leading by example. Moreover, there remains real value in the WTO's informal groups, where space is created to have international

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://searchforuksubsidies.beis.gov.uk/>

conversations on key questions such as sustainability and non-market matters. The UK can use such instruments, venues and tools to raise its priorities, such as green and digital economy issues. Much can also be achieved by pursuing plurilateral, and regional agreements, which can be a stepping stone to multilaterals. While TESSD has been meeting for 5 years, with 76 members engaging but not developing new disciplines (which were not in its mandate). By contrast, fishing subsidies disciplines at the WTO can be seen as a development that built from the detailed rules found in CPTPP onwards. And, where the system can be supported to work better, such as through the Advisory Centre for WTO Law, this should remain a UK priority.

## The UK's Trade and Industrial Strategies: A New Era for UK Trade Policy?

*NB This discussion took place a few weeks before the [UK Trade Strategy 2025](#) (and the [UK Modern Industrial Strategy 2025](#)) were released.*

1. The UK's new trade strategy marks a shift toward **evidence-based, sector-specific policymaking** that reflects today's global trade realities.
2. To be effective, the strategy must **balance** ambition with accountability, addressing trade-offs like growth versus equity, and ensuring sustained action beyond just principles.
3. **Re-engaging ex-exporters**, prioritizing EU relations, and expanding global partnerships—especially in the Indo-Pacific—are essential for restoring trade momentum and economic growth.

**A trade strategy, long overdue, is finally here.** In the five years since Brexit, the UK was conducting trade policy as an independent actor, without any strategic concept. The UK needs a trade strategy. What can it hope to do?

**A return to the basics, every assumption questioned, and data and evidence found to back up every position:** this was the vision of the new Secretary of State for Business and Trade, who commissioned the new trade and industrial strategies for 2025. For the trade strategy, this meant going back to the single biggest gap in DBT's data and research – determining on a qualitative and quantitative basis how our trade levers contribute to economic growth, directly or indirectly via other levers (such as Net Zero). The findings are clear: the efficacy of each trade lever depends on the sector, with the ones contributing the most tending to be the hardest to negotiate or influence.

And this is important for a trade strategy – as easy as it may be to declare principles and values such as labour rights or sustainability, confidently recognising and addressing the

trade-offs is difficult. Growth and innovation, for example, cannot be the **only** priorities – equity and economic security are among many important concerns.

**A modern trade strategy needs to fit the current world.** The old assumption of consistent liberalisation, and the consequent focus on exports only, has grown quickly outdated. Trump, tariffs, supply chain security, labour rights, plurilateralism - all are key features of a new context in which imports must be just as essential as drivers of trade policy.

**Many looked to the [Green Paper](#) as an indication of the likely direction of the strategy to come.** Unlike the previous government's '[Build Back Better](#)' initiative which appeared to channel funding toward government-favoured areas, the Green Paper was broadly welcomed for its strategic clarity, focus on eight priority sectors, and collaborative tone with business. The new approach is more engaging and rightly emphasizes regional development and rebuilding the UK's energy infrastructure—a major competitive disadvantage, given that UK energy prices are around 50% higher than the EU average. However, the strategy falls short on addressing energy policy in depth and lacks sufficient focus on training and reskilling, an area where the UK has historically underperformed. Brexit is underemphasized, despite its ongoing impact—particularly on small businesses, many of which are withdrawing from international trade due to increased complexity. There are also concerns about how well the strategy will be funded. The government's current approach—spending on public services, avoiding further tax increases, and maintaining bond market confidence—is impossible without significantly stronger economic growth, which means our closest trading partner – the EU - must be the top priority.

**Many UK businesses that previously exported have now stopped,** and re-engaging them will require a targeted and sustained effort. A recent survey of 600 members revealed that over 60% are still feeling the impact of trade disruptions, with some reporting severe losses. Our speaker described conversations with one business that lost £30 million in orders since April and is now facing potential redundancies, while another has lost £4 million. These are not isolated cases - entire sectors like clothing, footwear, and industrial goods feel overlooked. But with no one size fits all answer to exporters, many of whom were accidental exporters, support must be delivered step-by-step. And the government is already moving in the right direction – of seven key priorities for the EU reset recommended by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), progress has been made on five, and an annual summit process is now in place to ensure accountability.

**At the same time, the UK is expanding its global trade footprint,** with promising developments in the Indo-Pacific, including the UK-India Free Trade Agreement and membership in the CPTPP. These relationships must be nurtured to maintain the UK's

influence. Additionally, international agreements like the WTO (plurilateral) Agreement on e-Commerce must be translated into practical, operable texts to support digital trade.

**The UK is going to continue to be ‘robustly opportunistic’ when it comes to the pursuit of FTAs.** While the UK’s service exports significantly outweigh its goods exports, pursuing a services-focused FTA alone is unrealistic, as few partners would agree to it. However, it’s a mistake to view manufacturing and services as separate—services are deeply embedded in manufacturing value chains. For instance, although services officially account for just 9% of the West Midlands economy, this figure rises to around a third when services linked to manufacturing are included.

**The new trade strategy must strike the right balance between bold innovation and reliable execution.** Publishing a strategy is a significant step—it signals the government’s intent and sets out its principles. But will it also enhance accountability, for example through stronger parliamentary scrutiny of FTAs or the creation of an independent board of trade? That remains uncertain.

## The UK-EU Trade in Reset: Improving Neighbourly Relations?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. The UK-EU relationship is increasingly shaped by **shared geopolitical challenges**, driving a mutual recognition of the need for cooperation on energy, trade, and security.
2. The recent EU-UK summit marked **important but limited progress**, with cooperation on security and regulation advancing while significant gaps remain in services and industrial goods.
3. Prioritizing achievable, **step-by-step improvements**—such as reducing technical trade barriers and enhancing digital collaboration—offers the most realistic path forward.

The Starmer government’s ‘reset’ has marked a steady thaw of the UK’s relationship with the EU, culminating most recently with the [EU-UK summit in May](#).

**Some speakers argued that the Prime Minister oversold what has been agreed**, with the opportunity for so many things to go wrong in the future - and the only real agreement being on fish. While progress was made on issues where commonality of interest were obvious, as soon as interests diverged slightly it became difficult, with the EU blocking any attempt for what in their eyes is cherry-picking. While there was significant action on security and defence, much of this seemed to be a copy-paste from the [EU-Japan](#)

[agreement](#). And, while there are big steps forward on the economic front, issues will remain – MRA of conformity assessment and industrial goods was missing, as was services and wider mobility.

**Meanwhile, others celebrated the summit** – claiming that despite leaving a lot open for future talks, it has been a hugely important deal in substance. Not only is it commonly understood as a balanced and win-win package, it goes much further than just the low hanging fruit. Parties will now meet every six months to discuss the range of sub-areas, maritime, cyber, fish, energy cooperation. On many areas, from ETS to SPS, concrete discussions have led to clear parameters and channels that lay the foundation for swift negotiation and implementation. Such agreements to dynamically align SPS, ETS and electricity trading spell the advent of a world in which regulatory alignment is much closer. Academia should take note here - policymakers will be looking to research and advice in this context.

**The EU insists that the modest package of agreements and commitments to collaborate further in the [Common Understanding](#) is a meaningful step forward.** While ‘neither side got *everything* for Christmas’, some things are now ‘hooked’ - mentioned so that they can come up with further progress at the annual summit. And this really means something – for the bureaucracy of the EU at least, such guiding documents will be followed to put a political position into practice. While the timeframe is uncertain, there is hope for much faster progress than seen in Switzerland. Despite the bespoke nature of the arrangements on the vast number of issues making it complex and time-consuming, both sides are committed to working through it, aiming for a balanced approach without making progress in one area conditional on another.

**The UK government meanwhile, hopes that the Common Understanding marks a sign of longer-term thinking in the government,** which will also be reflected in industrial strategies in the coming weeks. As the government prioritises what the UK needs for its economy, ensuring we have a close relationship with our nearest largest market is very important makes the EU very important. Many elements of the summit agreement, such as the ETS and electricity strategy, are focused on long-term goals like contributing to 2050 targets and achieving net zero, requiring deep investment to benefit both consumers and industry.

**The UK and EU have been driven together by that the geopolitical challenges** that have changed the world almost unrecognisably. UK and EU partners recognise their new geopolitical responsibility to work together to negotiate across energy, SPS, ETS and fish. However, while the agreement commits to starting negotiations, political challenges remain.

**Firstly, when it comes to timings, the UK government is in a weak position.** Progress with the EU is needed for any hope of long-term growth. The real significant collapse in

UK trade (including goods exports) has clearly contributed to the pattern in GDP growth that the labour government now struggles against. For all the talk about supply-side constraints, the UK also has a foreign demand problem which is difficult to address. As a relatively small, open and exposed economy, 2016 was a bad year to exit the EU, and as time goes on, the assumptions that underlay any economic arguments in favour of Brexit (such as continued global trade liberalisation) have been proven wrong. Yet, politically, the government is in a difficult position and faces unsavoury time horizons. While negotiating a serious upgrade to the TCA would cost a lot of political capital in the short term, without short-term economic benefit. And its inability to assure the EU that that it will still be around in four years might thwart productive negotiations.

How can the UK government address the economy's competitiveness problems – exacerbated by macroeconomic pressures from China, the role of the pandemic, and electricity prices - without at least partially integrating into the single market for goods? The movement of people that the EU would require to agree on this would be politically impossible for the current government.

**For now, parties would do best to focus on the tangible, cumulative wins, rather than setting hopes on sweeping ambitions.** Industrial strategy integration, or collective competitiveness policy may seem attractive under current geo-economics, but the European Commission struggles with its member states struggle, let alone the UK. Meanwhile, the less glitzy policies, such as easing of technical barriers like SPS measures, can have an impact that is tangible: eliminating certificate requirements has saves estimated £1.5 million per month. Encouragingly, dialogue is deepening across areas - from raw materials to technology, but hard work will be required to bridge diverging interests on e.g. financial services.

**With so many possible avenues, what should the UK to focus its attention on?** Services is a key area, which was under addressed in the Common Understanding. There is an important role for government in services, which unlike the global value chains for goods, cannot rely on business interests to do a lot of the heavy lifting and open markets naturally. Digital is another important area of collaboration – and while there is a lot of legislation coming out of the commission, the EU sees the UK's big role in digital. This will likely become an area of joint focus.

## UK trade relations in a changing world order: looking beyond the G7

*Three key takeaways:*

1. The UK must redefine its trade strategy and **diversify** its relationships by engaging pragmatically with emerging economies like India, China, and Africa, moving beyond its EU past.
2. Shifting global dynamics and technological advances demand the UK pursue **flexible, inclusive trade frameworks** focused on digital, services, and sustainable development.
3. To stay relevant in a multipolar world, the UK needs to **balance** relations among major powers while building more equitable and modern partnerships with the Global South as co-creators of the future global order.

**In an era of geopolitical flux and economic transformation, the UK finds itself unmoored—no longer part of the EU, yet not aligned with any single global bloc.** How it repositions in the evolving trade landscape is a pressing question. One starting point is to decentre its trade narrative—viewing UK trade through the lens of its partners, from India to Africa to China. Post-Brexit, and amid shifting global alliances, the UK must rethink how it engages globally—not as a nostalgic power, but as a pragmatic, forward-looking actor.

In May, within the span of just a week, the UK government came out with three major announcements: the India-UK trade deal, the UK-US Economic Prosperity Partnership with the US, and EU-UK Reset. The sequencing of these moves was seen as strategic—positioning the UK not merely as a Western power, but as an actor increasingly aligned with emerging economies, notably the E7 group.

**The UK-India trade deal, in particular, marks a watershed moment.** Far more expansive than any of India's 15 previous FTAs, this deal spans 27 chapters, encompassing not just trade in goods, but also digital technologies, gender equity, and anti-corruption measures. The agreement covers up to 90-95% of tariff lines, indicating a level of market access, - this reflects a depth of engagement rarely seen in Indian FTAs. With India's growth projected to outpace all other major economies until at least 2030, the UK is clearly pivoting toward markets with long-term potential. India's market is huge, with a rising middle class, providing opportunities for British manufacturers. For India, this partnership is an opportunity to tap into the UK's innovation ecosystem, align more closely with its regulatory standards, and diversify its supply chains away from a dominant China.

#### **How might UK-China relations evolve in the current climate of geopolitical tension?**

Interestingly, the UK is perceived in China as less politically volatile and more open to constructive engagement than the United States—a sentiment that could serve as the basis for closer collaboration. Despite the UK's decline post Brexit, the UK continues to have successful and longstanding businesses in Asia. China has been expanding its engagement with western countries, including launching large trade expos in Guangzhou

and giving largescale support for the private sector. Especially in sectors like artificial intelligence, where the UK is lagging behind, there could be opportunities for mutual benefit. With China's vast datasets and rapid rollout of its economic data and technology ecosystem, the UK could stand to gain by partnering rather than competing - AI development is increasingly data-driven, and China's scale gives it an advantage in training sophisticated models. National security concerns would require collaboration to be grounded in clear governance structures, especially around data sharing and standards. Still, ignoring China in global economic planning would be strategically unwise. Shared initiatives in these areas could allow the UK to leapfrog in efficiency while benefiting from the intellectual capital China already exports to other countries—including the US.

**The evolving global landscape demands a fundamental reassessment** of how the international community engages with the world's most marginalised and vulnerable countries—particularly across Africa. Despite decades of globalization, the African continent remains structurally marginalized in world trade. Africa is still predominantly treated as a commodity exporter (reflected in the number of African countries in the UNCTAD classification of high dependency commodity countries), an echo of the colonial trade model. Current development and trade negotiations remain shaped by outdated donor–recipient mindsets, despite growing recognition that these approaches no longer serve today's realities. Both sides are stuck in a cycle: dominant actors treat engagement as obligation, while African negotiators often focus on aid rather than asserting strategic agency—hindering real progress and failing to reflect Africa's economic potential.

**In fact, Africa's trade landscape is shifting rapidly**, with trade with emerging powers like China and India rising from 1% in 1990 to 28% today, while Europe's share has declined significantly from 45% to 28%. This reflects a broader realignment as Africa leverages its demographic and technological potential to assert a more strategic role in the global economy. At the same time, disruptive technologies like AI and quantum computing are reshaping production and undermining traditional regulatory frameworks, opening new policy space for agile actors. For African economies, this moment calls for a pivot from reliance on flawed global financial systems toward building a robust, autonomous financial architecture. Initiatives like Afreximbank's digital payments platform and the mobilisation of Africa's \$2.9 trillion in domestic savings are early moves toward economic self-determination, including support for SMEs and regional value chains.

**Moreover, the relevance of pillars of the old international regime, such as Most-Favoured Nation treatment, is increasingly contested**, particularly in light of the evolving US tariff landscape under Trump-era trade policies. For example, Indian policymakers navigate this reality while remaining anchored in a commitment to a rules-

based multilateral trading system while recognising systemic imbalances in global institutions. India, often mischaracterised as isolationist, is in fact pursuing strategy that includes asserting its interests firmly while seeking to consolidate and project the collective voice of the Global South. Given the centrality of the US as India's largest trading partner, preserving a constructive bilateral relationship is imperative, even as current tariff structures undermine predictability. India's approach across trade, climate, and digital domains is necessarily multipronged—combining assertive negotiation with coalition-building to rebalance global economic governance.

**The tools of trade diplomacy are also evolving.** Institutions created in the post-WWII era are struggling to adapt to a world reshaped by climate change, technological disruption, and demographic shifts. Traditional FTAs are time-consuming and politically fraught. There was a consensus that new frameworks are needed—ones that are more inclusive, more representative, and better suited to the realities of the 21st century. The future may lie in more flexible instruments: sectoral deals, regulatory alignment protocols, and expert-level collaborations. Trade, after all, is no longer just about tariffs—it's about digital flows, services, innovation ecosystems, and sustainable development.

**Climate and technology - including AI - offer strategic advantages.** Africa holds unmatched potential in renewable energy, and its youthful population makes it a natural fit for innovation-led growth. However, to fully realize this potential, the UK—and others—must engage not as benefactors but as genuine partners. That requires investment in infrastructure, regulatory cooperation, and value chain integration—not just market access or carbon border adjustments.

**For the UK, a balancing act is essential.** In this choppy global sea, the UK is a mid-sized vessel navigating between three trade super-tankers: the US, China, and the EU. Rather than latching onto any single one, the UK's strength may lie in its ability to maintain working relationships with all three, while also forging ties with middle powers and emerging economies. As the UK heads into the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14), there is a renewed push to form coalitions of the willing—countries that may not dominate global trade individually but together can push forward shared interests in a stable and rules-based system. The UK's historical respect for multilateralism and its robust regulatory framework give it credibility in these conversations.

**The Global South is not waiting. The world is undergoing a profound realignment, driven by technology, climate urgency, and rising multipolarity.** From India's regional coalitions to China's digital ambitions to Africa's financial sovereignty movements, alternative systems are being built. If the UK wants to remain relevant, it must not only acknowledge these developments but engage with them constructively. That means seeing emerging economies not as peripheral actors, but as co-authors of the future

global order. For the UK, this is a time not for nostalgia or retrenchment, but for imaginative, balanced, and inclusive engagement. The road ahead will demand creative diplomacy—sectoral cooperation where full FTAs are unviable, alliances across ideological divides, and a firm commitment to multilateralism even amid fragmentation. The UK cannot afford to pick a side in the great power contest, nor can it simply revert to legacy relationships. Its path forward lies in thoughtful navigation, strategic flexibility, and a willingness to co-create the future with partners across the global spectrum.

## UK Trade and Investment Strategy in Digital: the Future of UK Trade?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. The UK is **leading in trade digitalisation**, with recent reforms drastically reducing paperwork and improving efficiency, positioning it to shape global standards in digital trade.
2. Despite its benefits, digital trade **risks deepening inequality**—both regionally and globally—unless policies address the uneven uptake of technology, environmental impacts, and capacity gaps in developing countries.
3. As digital rule-making lags behind rapid innovation, the UK must step into a global leadership role to ensure fair, sustainable, and secure digital trade, particularly through **inclusive governance and responsible data practices**.

**Digital is the future of UK trade.** It is a huge – and hugely important - topic, that makes up 25% of the global trade economy – and we see it, use it and feel it in every aspect of our daily lives. For the UK, which has the third most valuable digital exports globally (after the US and EU), and is in a unique position to be bold and innovative in trade, now is an exciting – but challenging - time.

**The first step is trade digitalisation – in which the UK has already been leading the way.** Under the [Electronic Trade Documents Act 2023](#), businesses can now use electronic documents in their trade transactions. While this might seem simple, most global trade remains paper-based – with the obvious risks that papers can get lost, damaged, contain mistakes, and so on. For a business shipping whiskey from Dublin to London, getting the bottle from the distillery, to the logistics provider, to the warehouse, to the retailer could include up to 36 different pieces of documentation. Government pilots suggest these changes are bringing in an 89% reduction in paper documents, 90% drop in emails, and 40% cut to import time. The change is spreading - other countries, such as Germany and France are now also legislating for trade digitalisation.

The next steps for digital trade, especially digitally delivered services, bring both vast opportunities and increasingly complex challenge for the UK government and governments worldwide.

**The biggest question for the government is how to harness the digital for fair and equitable economic growth.** While digital delivery tools make services more tradable, they also expose a paradox: smaller firms may grow faster, yet it is the larger, older firms that are more likely to adopt the technologies in the first place. This circularity reflects a broader issue in the UK: the sluggish diffusion of digital innovation, which helps explain the ‘productivity puzzle.’ The real challenge lies not in making workers more productive per se, but in enabling the widespread adoption of productivity-enhancing tools. Compounding this is the unresolved tension between incentivising innovation and ensuring fair compensation for creators—a legislative challenge that the UK must navigate if it hopes to become a leading tech hub. Meanwhile, the spatial concentration of digital gains is stark: Greater London exports 15 times more services than Manchester, raising urgent questions about the equitable distribution of digital dividends. Without targeted policy, investment in digital tech risks deepening regional and social divides.

**A second key challenge - often overlooked – is the environmental impact of digital,** and the tension between the government's plans for growth via the digital economy and the transition to Net Zero. From production to disposal, digital tools carry environmental cost. In 2020, ICT was responsible for an estimated 1.8–3.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions—comparable to the aviation sector. These figures likely understate the true toll, especially as energy-intensive technologies like blockchain and AI gain traction. Simple GHG figures don’t capture impacts on water use, mining, and mounting e-waste. The rebound effects of digital efficiency suggest that the digital economy may not simply offer greener alternatives, but could also impose an additional environmental burden. The UK government must review environmental effects of trade policy and new strategies (a requirement Environmental Policy Principles Statement (EPPS) duty). But there is an urgent need for policy to establish consistent, evidence-led metrics and embed sustainability into businesses’ tech design and reporting. A global, coordinated response—one that includes diverse stakeholders and prioritises long-term environmental integrity—is essential if digital progress is to be truly sustainable.

**Thirdly, digital trade creates complexities for the agenda of digital development, and the principle of leaving no one behind.** Treating data as a commodity and pushing for unrestricted cross-border flows, risks undermining the digital sovereignty of developing nations trying to protect emerging industries. Provisions banning access to source code in trade deals may spur innovation but also limit oversight—especially as AI systems embed bias. Meanwhile, digital taxation remains murky, with data’s mobility making it hard to track, value, or tax—turning traditional tax havens into data havens. Many developing countries lack the capacity to engage in negotiations. Without technical

support, they risk exclusion from rule-making that shapes their digital futures. Asymmetric power dynamics and political sensitivities make this a delicate space. The UK has already demonstrated its strong position to act in support of developing countries, including multilaterally, and must continue at every opportunity (e.g. working with India). Building negotiating capacity and respecting sovereignty will continue to be key to fair digital trade.

**Indeed, the UK is in the position to step forward in a much-needed global leadership role.** Global rule-making on data remains far behind where it needs to be. As data generation accelerates, so do data abuses such as the unchecked scraping and misuse of data (often at zero marginal cost), and cyber security threats. There is also a growing need to address abuse of market power by big tech. Developed countries must take the lead in resolving business concerns within trade texts, while creating mechanisms that enable cross-border data flows when conditions are right. Although there is little appetite for introducing competition into the global dialogue (especially given that three quarters of A companies are in the US or China), competition authorities are already quietly coming together on this issue. And the UK has been seeking innovative solutions – although not always fast enough: the EU data adequacy for UK has been kicked into the long grass for 6 months – a hugely precarious situation for the UK.

## UK Trade and Labour Rights Beyond 2025: Prioritising Home or Abroad?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. Trade policy is increasingly recognised as a **tool for advancing labour rights**, but its effectiveness depends on complementing formal provisions with education, awareness, and direct engagement with workers and businesses.
2. Enforcement mechanisms like the US-Mexico Rapid Response Mechanism show promise but risk **reinforcing inequalities** unless paired with inclusive capacity-building and grassroots empowerment.
3. As trade goes digital, labour rights frameworks must **evolve** too, addressing new challenges like virtual migration, platform work, and data privacy that traditional trade rules often ignore.

**The UK government has a vision for its domestic approach: to make work pay.** This key priority is being addressed directly by the Employment Rights Bill, currently progressing through Parliament. But indirectly, it needs to create the conditions for long-term sustainable economic growth, and sees trade policy as a key lever.

**This reflects an increasingly widespread recognition growing that trade affects labour rights.** The world has moved well past an era where no one talks about labour in formal trade talks. Labour provisions have long been included in many free trade agreements. From UK FTAs with Australia and New Zealand, to the EU's TSD provisions, to examples across the Atlantic with the US-Mexico Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) these approaches aim to help support workers by projecting labour rights through international supply chains. Such provisions range from the most egregious issues – such as modern slavery, and forced labour, to core labour standards such as health and safety, to more recent discussions in relation to data privacy of workers.

**Previous examples of labour provisions have had varying levels of success.** The US-Mexico RRM, developed under huge pressure from Congress, was a stick approach – an asymmetrical instrument with Mexico to enforce labour rights. But while the RRM has clearly done some good, its flaw is that it is a mechanism that *enforces* before it *teaches*. The existence of the RRM means that, formally, workers have new labour rights. The problem, demonstrated by empirical research, is that the vast majority of workers had no idea that their rights had changed, let alone their right to enforce. Thus the RRM created a dual regime, privileging workers already affiliated with US-aligned unions. Critics argue that this strengthened the elite to the detriment of marginalised workers.

**But government to government can only be part of the picture.** The provisions of formal trade agreements can only go so far. The Canadian approach recognises that the dispute mechanism for a trade and labour chapter is a last resort only – and has not yet used one.

**Governments must work directly with businesses to address global value chains is just as essential.** They must also talk *directly* with labour to consult on trade. As seen in the RRM, enforcement and sanctions are no substitute for capacity building, knowledge and awareness raising. A labour chapter is flimsy without associated education and training in place.

**There is a need to be creative:** the EU has been innovative with Batteries Regulation, requiring a digital product passport, in somewhat of a fusion of the Rules of Origin and Corporate Diligence approaches. Such specific targeting may be able to address the root causes. The UK government's pursuit of ingraining 'evidence based policy' is a welcome development, and may help to identify the right causes and levers.

**The opportunities and challenges for labour rights in trade are evolving.** Sanctions remain an old, but longstanding weapon. The issue, however is how to determine that they are effective, beyond the 'name and shame'? And, as one speaker put it 'as soon as you fire, you've lost your bullet.'

**In the modern age, digital trade poses new challenges for labour rights.** To date, the UK and EU approaches have been that labour standards are important exceptions to FTA

rules. But we should be at least as concerned as to how standard trade rules construct labour markets. Digital trade – now defined by the WTO as all trade which is delivered or ordered digitally – makes trade faster and simpler. But work and labour is overlooked by the WTO, despite issues such as digital services temporary and virtual migration leading to unique labour conditions and issues of precarity, privacy, and working time.

## UK Trade policy during a planetary Crisis: A Green Trade Policy?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. **Critical minerals** have become a flashpoint at the intersection of trade, security, and climate policy, with rising protectionism threatening global cooperation just as demand surges.
2. The UK must pursue a **pragmatic, multilateral approach** to sustainability—focusing on circular economy strategies, ethical supply chains, and alignment with climate commitments in trade policy.
3. For the WTO to remain relevant in the era of green transition, it must actively support sustainable development by **clarifying rules, enabling inclusive dialogue**, and empowering climate-related trade measures.

**The once-clear boundaries between trade, environment, and national security are rapidly dissolving.** Critical minerals at the heart of this convergence, with demand for resources like copper skyrocketing—so much so that the amount needed for the green transition over the next 30 years is double all the copper ever mined in history. Yet instead of liberalising markets to meet this demand, countries are imposing new restrictions, export controls, and taxes—particularly from major producers like China.

This shift reflects a growing ‘national security paradox’: the more trade is framed as a security issue, the less secure it becomes. The scramble for resources has revived extraction methods once thought obsolete, from deep-sea mining to Arctic expeditions. At the core of this tension is a powerful perception of scarcity. Critical minerals challenge the long-held belief that open trade fosters stability—revealing instead that resource insecurity may be driving fragmentation, not cooperation.

**The UK faces a stark reality in the critical minerals crunch:** as an ‘influential credible middle power’, it lacks both the natural reserves (Cornwall’s lithium aside) and the market leverage to coerce major players like China, which is already 15 years ahead in investment. The UK must also avoid repeating past mistakes. Rather than mimicking the US’s maximalist approach of secondary sanctions and export controls, the UK must chart a more pragmatic, multilateral path. Its strength lies in diplomacy and coalition-building, not coercion. Embracing a circular economy—where critical minerals are

reused and recycled—is not just good policy, it’s essential for long-term sustainability. But this commitment must extend beyond domestic borders. The UK should ensure that the mining it incentivises abroad aligns with its ESG principles, avoiding environmental or ethical blind spots. Trade deals like those with the GCC must come under deeper scrutiny, are they advancing UK climate commitments—or quietly undermining them?

**Secondly, agricultural and food products are also central elements to trade and sustainability debates.** The EU and UK have both introduced unilateral regulations to tackle deforestation linked to imports (the EUDR and UKFCR, respectively), yet their approaches diverge significantly. The EU’s system is more granular, targeting all deforestation down to plots as small as 0.5 hectares, while the UK focuses solely on illegal deforestation and applies rules only to large operators. These differences, coupled with a lack of coordination, risk creating loopholes and market leakage, undermining the broader environmental goals. Diplomatic tensions have surfaced, around the EU’s three-tier risk classification system, which has been criticised for being politically driven rather than environmentally grounded – with only Belarus, Russia, North Korea and Myanmar categorised as ‘high risk’. Still, there are signs of innovation. The UK has introduced positive incentives—such as linking improved animal welfare standards to increased quotas—marking a first in trade policy. A constructive, competitive relationship between the UK and EU could be a powerful force for progress, especially if both sides commit to learning from each other and aligning their sustainability and trade agendas more closely.

**In this context, what is the role for the multilateral system? The WTO should also play role in shaping trade policy for the planetary crisis.** It may be true that the future of the WTO hangs in the balance—not because its mission is flawed, but because efforts to reform it risk undermining its very foundation. As one speaker warned, weakening the dispute settlement system or reverting to non-binding rules would be like ‘destroying the village to save it.’ The WTO was built to uphold binding trade rules and serve as a central forum for resolving disputes—an international rule of law for trade. Its founding principles, including a commitment to sustainable development, were no accident; they were deliberately enshrined from the outset.

**But today, as the global agenda shifts toward green growth and sustainability, the WTO must step up.** Critics who claim sustainable development lies outside its remit are mistaken – in fact, this was an intention from its very first meeting. Trade can—and must—be a tool for climate action and inclusive growth. While the US remains politically gridlocked, the rest of the world—the 87% of the global economy—should press ahead. Much more can be done through trade to advance the cause of sustainable development, and there is ample room to revise existing rules and make the WTO a proactive force for sustainability. The challenge is not whether the WTO can support green growth, but whether its members have the will to let it.

Indeed, despite frequent claims to the contrary, the WTO does not inherently obstruct green trade. Measures like the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) have drawn sharp criticism within WTO circles. The challenge lies in reconciling climate ambition with trade rules. The WTO could become an *affirmative* agent for climate action—by clearly delineating which climate-related trade measures are permissible. Without such clarity, initiatives like CBAM risk falling foul of WTO obligations, particularly where they disproportionately affect certain countries.

**Least developed countries (LDCs) are especially vulnerable.** Though their exports to the UK under CBAM are minimal, the legal basis for exempting them remains murky. This highlights a broader issue: WTO rules need to evolve to bridge the gap between trade fairness and climate justice. Meanwhile, the EU faces growing pressure to delay or adjust the EUDR, with concerns over compliance capacity, diplomatic fallout, and unintended leakage—where trade simply shifts to less regulated markets. A more inclusive, consultative approach is needed, one that recognises local systems like Brazil's forest laws and explores mutual recognition. If the WTO is to support sustainable development, it must move from passive arbiter to proactive enabler.

## The UK's Economic Security: Walking the Tightrope?

*Three key takeaways:*

1. Economic security is seen by some as replacing market liberalisation as the central focus of trade policy, driven by **rising geopolitical tensions** and **declining global trust**.
2. Countries can address vulnerabilities through **strategic cooperation** and targeted resilience measures without abandoning the WTO framework.
3. Balancing openness with preparedness, especially in relations with China and other major powers, is essential for building a **stable and adaptive** global economic order.

**The global conversation around trade policy is undergoing a profound transformation.** No longer defined solely by market access and liberalisation, today's economic policymaking is increasingly shaped by concerns over economic security. The traditional model—focused on lowering tariffs and opening markets—is being overtaken by new priorities: export controls, national resilience strategies, and closer scrutiny of supply chains. This shift reflects a broader reality marked by economic uncertainty, geopolitical rivalry, and declining trust in the international system that once underpinned decades of globalisation.

**A key driver of this change is the erosion of trust in global institutions and frameworks.** Where the US security umbrella once provided stability and enabled deep interdependence, today's multipolar world lacks a single guarantor of economic order. The rise of China as a credible global hegemon—and the growing influence of other powers such as India—has disrupted the status quo. Trust once made economic dependency acceptable; without it, reliance becomes vulnerability. The EU's costly transition away from Russian energy in the wake of the Ukraine war, reportedly amounting to over €700 billion in support, illustrates the strategic risks of unguarded interdependence.

**One of the central dilemmas now facing the UK and its peers is how to safeguard national interests without closing off the economy.** Protectionism is not the answer; instead, countries must develop a more nuanced understanding of exposure, risk, and resilience. Economic security does not need to be synonymous with isolation. Strategic cooperation remains essential—particularly in areas such as energy, rare earths, and other critical raw materials. The UK's recent energy challenges and its dependency on key inputs highlight the importance of international collaboration in building resilience. No country can navigate these challenges alone.

**This raises a broader debate: is economic security fundamentally incompatible with the global trading rules governed by the WTO?** There is a growing belief—especially in the US—that the WTO no longer meets the demands of a security-conscious world. But this assumption may be too hasty. While the boundary between economic and national security is indeed becoming increasingly blurred, WTO rules allow for considerable flexibility. States can still pursue investment strategies and other tools of economic statecraft without breaching their WTO obligations. Far from being irrelevant, the WTO can remain a useful framework—provided it evolves and is used creatively rather than discarded entirely.

**Importantly, the rules-based order must not prevent dialogue among strategic rivals.** Critical raw materials, for example, present long-term structural issues that require cooperation between powers like the US and China. Encouragingly, recent talks between the two countries on export controls suggest that communication is possible, even amid rising tensions. Such dialogue is vital to prevent reactive policies from spiralling into full-scale trade conflicts.

**Japan offers a valuable case study in managing these tensions with strategic pragmatism.** Though sometimes characterised as overly business-focused, Japan has played a quiet but important role in shaping the future of open trade. Its leadership in launching the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) has provided a new cornerstone for global trade governance. Japan has also championed the Indo-Pacific vision—a framework rooted in peaceful dispute resolution,

freedom of navigation, and open trade. Its presidency of the G7 in 2023 placed economic security high on the global agenda.

**At the same time, Japan’s relationship with China highlights the complexities of maintaining open ties with an increasingly opaque and authoritarian economic partner.** China remains Japan’s largest trading partner, but concerns over state subsidies, regulatory opacity, and growing political risk have caused Japanese investment in China to fall for three consecutive years. Businesses and policymakers alike are acknowledging that the risks of operating in China can no longer be assumed to be manageable or predictable—they must be proactively addressed.

**For the UK, these global shifts are acutely relevant.** The UK faces significant vulnerabilities—economic, political, and fiscal—that have been exacerbated by its departure from the EU. The UK is also highly open and deeply dependent on the US for both security and trade. Yet despite these constraints, there are reasons for cautious optimism. The UK retains the potential for thought leadership in this space, and recent improvements in its relationship with the EU point to greater strategic flexibility. It must now invest in the foresight and institutional capacity needed to navigate an increasingly volatile global order. The WTO may be weakened, but it still exists—and with the right approach, the UK can help shape its renewal.

**A key message from the discussion was the importance of balance.** Responding to insecurity carries its own risks—building overly rigid barriers can be as costly as exposure itself. The EU’s hesitancy to deploy its Anti-Coercion Instrument—especially against powerful allies like the US—has been interpreted by some as weakness. Yet it may also reflect strategic restraint: sometimes the existence of such tools is deterrent enough.

On the UK’s position amid the intensifying US -China rivalry and the weaponisation of trade, there was some confidence that the UK has so far walked a careful line. It has remained open to both sides while avoiding direct confrontation. The challenge going forward will be to maintain this flexibility without losing leverage or clarity of purpose.

**Insecurity today is not confined to military threats or traditional forms of risk.** It is amplified by rapid technological disruption, fragile supply chains, climate volatility, and the speed at which shocks cascade across borders. In this context, forward planning becomes a necessity. Anticipating vulnerabilities—rather than reacting to them—will always be more cost-effective. That requires government leadership, but also close collaboration with the private sector. Businesses are often the first to encounter disruption, and their strategic decisions play a key role in shaping national economic resilience.

**Finally, economic security must not be framed solely as a response to China.** While China is undoubtedly a central player in many of these debates, conflating economic security with hostility would be a mistake. China is not only a competitor—it is also a critical partner in addressing shared challenges, including the energy transition, rare earth supply, and technological innovation. Dialogue, cooperation, and mutual recognition of interest will be essential in managing this relationship.

If pursued thoughtfully, economic security can be a force for stability, not division. By combining strategic foresight with inclusive diplomacy and institutional innovation, the UK and its partners can help shape a global economic system that is more resilient, more adaptable, and ultimately more secure.

## What Next for the Multilateral Trading System?

*Two key takeaways:*

1. The WTO is under **unprecedented strain**, with major powers challenging its core functions, yet most members still see it as essential for fair and inclusive global trade.
2. Real impact is happening beyond formal agreements, as dialogue on issues like gender, sustainability, and small business shows the **WTO's continued relevance**—especially for smaller and developing nations.

**The recent WTO mini-ministerial meeting of trade ministers<sup>6</sup> was fascinating for what it revealed beneath the surface.** It was the first time this group had convened in this format, including meeting the new US Trade Representative. Many expected confrontation, but the meeting had a scripted calm, with delegates sticking to their lines.

The US made its position clear on dispute settlement and the Appellate Body: the two-tiered system is not coming back. Special and differential treatment in development is also being redefined; China and India cannot not be treated the same as small island states like Barbados or Samoa. Many small nations agree. The focus must shift to using existing rules more intelligently to allow for meaningful differential treatment. This is not business as usual - this is the most serious threat the multilateral trading system has ever faced. The world has changed, and the WTO must evolve with it.

**In the meantime, clamour for WTO reform continues**, but what does ‘reform’ even mean anymore? Where is the value added? Is the WTO itself broken, or are a few powerful members holding the system hostage? And, if 162 out of 164 members agree on a path forward and two block it, is the WTO failing—or are those two members the problem? The WTO *feels* busy—plurilateral negotiations are buzzing—but the rhetoric of deadlock

---

<sup>6</sup> An informal WTO ministerial convened on 3 June 2025, in Paris

persists. The question - Is the institution still relevant – is heard over and over. Yet if people keep asking the question, then surely it cannot be irrelevant.

**Transparency remain vital.** For small countries, the WTO is a rare platform to voice trade interests. Most members want the WTO to survive because they understand what it represents. Over the past six months, the importance of this institution has become even clearer. Even without formal agreements, WTO negotiations have domestic consequences. Take fisheries: even without a binding deal, many countries are now paying closer attention to sustainability. The WTO is also addressing issues long underestimated - small businesses, gender, climate, diversity. The Trade and Gender Working Group is doing remarkable work. The SME group is showing strong leadership. Not everything needs to result in new rules. Sometimes, dialogue is enough.

**The WTO Secretariat is regaining confidence under new leadership.** But why the resistance when it tries to do the basics—like showing the real economic impact of tariffs? Developed countries may not need this data, but developing countries do. The Secretariat must be empowered to do its job.

**Regarding development,** coordinating the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group remains a challenge. The divide between developed and developing countries is often artificial, yet the expectation is for a unified voice. That risks reducing the group’s message to the lowest common denominator. There’s also a growing gap in expertise between negotiators from the Global North and South. Academics must do more to support developing countries—producing work that is accessible, relevant, and empowering.

**Post-Brexit, the UK has found its voice at the WTO.** In Geneva, British representatives are respected for their engagement, listening, and bridge-building. Across health, human rights, technology, and trade, the UK is seen as a genuine partner—especially by the ACP.

**The discussion ended with a quotation from *The Sun Also Rises*: ‘How did you go bankrupt? Two ways: gradually, then suddenly.’** Hemingway’s famous warning was given as a warning for today. Gender equality, climate action, democracy—these values are being eroded slowly, and are at risk of collapse. If actors are unguarded about the gradual decline, they will find a more sudden collapse instead.