

## ORAL CONCOURS 2015

### ANGLAIS - LVI

#### Britons Still Want a Global Role

LONDON — The British election is fewer than 100 days away, and it's a mess — at least five parties in a fragmented system designed for two, and absolute rule by the winner.

In 1951, the two main parties won 97 percent of the vote; current opinion polls suggest they will be lucky now to win 65 percent. No one expects any party to win an overall majority on May 7. The resulting hung Parliament will mean either a fragile minority government or another European-style (horrors!) coalition government.

It is not even clear whether David Cameron of the Conservatives or Ed Miliband of Labour will be the prime minister. So the election campaign thus far has been timid, with parties appealing to their core constituencies and trying to beat off their perceived threats in marginal constituencies. For the Tories, that is the anti-Europe, anti-immigration U.K. Independence Party; for Labour, that is the Scottish National Party, which endangers about half of Labour's 41 Scottish seats.

The campaign has focused mostly on personalities, who will cut the budget better, the dangers of Muslim radicalism and how everyone loves the National Health Service to death. There has been little discussion of foreign policy, other than caricatures of the European Union; there has been almost no talk of Russia and Ukraine, or of Syria and Iraq.

Nor has there been much of a debate on the impact of current and future spending cuts on the British military, on modernizing and retaining Britain's submarine-based nuclear deterrent and indeed on the country's shrinking role in world affairs, where Paris — despite its own economic troubles — can seem a more useful and capable strategic partner to Washington than London.

Still, underneath the political swordfights are some interesting trends in British attitudes toward defense and foreign policy, which have been laid out in a new study of popular and elite opinion done by Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Despite current trends, the study found that more than 60 percent of respondents from both the public and the elite believe that Britain should remain "a great power," the highest level since the survey was first conducted in 2010. Nearly 70 percent think Britain has a responsibility to maintain international security, while nearly 60 percent support providing troops for peacekeeping missions and a clear majority believe Britain should help lead the global response to climate change.

While rejecting isolationism, the British are more reluctant to pay the cost of their ambitions, reflexively euroskeptic and increasingly hostile to foreign aid.

They are also more ambivalent about Britain's "special" relationship with Washington, with some 30 percent believing that Britain's closest ties should be with the European Union rather than the United States (25 percent), a reversal of the position two years ago. That may indicate popular confusion or declining trust in Washington.

While some 60 percent favor an in-or-out referendum on membership in the European Union, as Mr. Cameron has promised if re-elected, the public is evenly divided on staying or leaving, with about 20 percent still unsure or unwilling to vote. The public also has a highly inflated view of the net costs of membership, and almost half support limits on the right of European Union citizens to live and work anywhere within the bloc.

Among opinion leaders, however, more than 70 percent favor continued European Union membership. And the elite are more concerned about promoting British trade than the general public, which prioritizes border protection and counterterrorism. "The public appears to reject ideas of decline and supports an ambitious British foreign policy," said Thomas Raines, who wrote the report. But the challenge to politicians trying to cut the budget is obvious.

The Chatham House study was based on a YouGov poll in August of a representative sample of 2,059 adults, using an online opt-in panel that does not meet New York Times methodological standards. But the results are indicative, and the poll of 704 "opinion-formers" was not designed, of course, to be random.

The New York Times, 29 January 2015