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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 26 November 2015**



# House of Commons

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*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

*The Attorney General was asked—*

#### Syria: Legality of Air Strikes

1. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If he will publish his legal advice on the legality of the UK carrying out air strikes in Syria in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution on that matter. [902342]

9. **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): If he will publish his legal advice on the legality of the UK carrying out air strikes in Syria in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution on that matter. [902350]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** It is a long-standing convention that Law Officers' advice is not published. However, as hon. Members will know, the Prime Minister is setting out today the case for taking further action in Syria, and he will also set out the legal basis for doing so.

**Alan Brown:** I thank the Attorney General for that answer, and I hope that the Scottish media are listening on this issue of the publication of legal advice with respect to the Scottish Parliament. I welcome the fact that there will be some disclosure later on. I understand convention, but I still think full disclosure of legal advice should be given rather than made a part of the Prime Minister's statement. We need to learn the lessons from Iraq, when the Government of the day went backwards and forwards on legal advice until they got the answer they wanted. I therefore ask again for full disclosure.

**The Attorney General:** As I say, the hon. Gentleman will see that the legal basis for action is, in the Government's view, set out in what the Prime Minister intends to say. Indeed, he has responded as he said he would to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report, and that response has been published this morning for all Members to see. As for the legal advice that the Law Officers give, it can be argued that the convention is there for very good reason. There are essentially two reasons. The first is to enable legal advice to be given to Government in a frank and open way, which is best done when advice is not published; and secondly, of course, the legal advice the Law Officers give is part of the collective responsibility of Cabinet decision-making. Again, there are good reasons for not publishing it on those grounds.

**John Nicolson:** Does the Attorney General not realise that in an open and transparent democracy, it is really not good enough to rely on convention? For the House

to understand the legal basis on which bombing may begin, it is vital for Members to be trusted with this information, so I appeal to the Attorney General to reverse his decision.

**The Attorney General:** As I say, Members on both sides will have the chance to understand what the legal basis for the Government's proposals will be, but there is a distinction to be made between the Government's legal basis for action and the precise advice that Law Officers give. For the reasons I have explained, I do not think it sensible in what is undoubtedly an open and transparent democracy to publish that advice.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): In the absence of United Nations Security Council resolution 2249, there are still arguments that air strikes are legal. Does the Attorney General agree that, in the light of that resolution, the legal case has been strengthened?

**The Attorney General:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that there were legal grounds for action in the absence of a Security Council resolution. Such a resolution is not necessary, in my view, to justify action of this kind. It is, of course, extremely useful that what the UN Security Council resolution clearly does is underline the logic for action in the way that we are setting out today. I agree with my hon. Friend.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): The Attorney General may say it is not necessary, but does he think it would be better if a chapter 7 resolution explicitly endorsing military action against ISIS was passed at the United Nations? Have the Government made any attempts to achieve such a resolution, and which countries do the Government believe would block it?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend will realise, of course, that that particular resolution was secured with the unanimous support of the Security Council. What it indicates is that all necessary measures should be taken in order to counter ISIL. As I have said, it is important to recognise that the legal basis for action here, which the Prime Minister will set out today, is not dependent on the presence of a Security Council resolution, but I think that what has been agreed in the Security Council underlines the case that we are making, which is that action should be taken and that there is a lawful basis for doing so.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): President Hollande has said that France is at war with Daesh, but my understanding is that no one has formally declared war on anyone. Will the Attorney General advise the House on the merits and demerits of a formal declaration of war?

**The Attorney General:** I think we must be very careful not to dignify Daesh with a status it does not deserve. It seems to me very clear that what we are doing here is setting out a basis under which this country is entitled to defend itself from what constitutes an armed attack, or the threat of such, not just from other states, but from terrorist organisations. In my view, Daesh falls firmly into the latter camp.

### Hate Crimes against Disabled People

2. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to improve the conviction rate for hate crimes against disabled people. [902343]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland)**: The Crown Prosecution Service recently revised its disability hate crime legal guidance for prosecutors. As part of its ongoing commitment to achieving meaningful improvement in disability hate crime prosecutions, it has mandated that disability hate crime training for all prosecutors should be completed by the end of the year.

**Henry Smith**: What contacts have been made between disability interest groups and governmental agencies to foster a better approach to the addressing of hate crime?

**The Solicitor General**: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that, along with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People and the Minister for Preventing Abuse and Exploitation, I recently set up and took part in a ministerial round table with Government agencies and the third sector to deal with precisely that issue. We gave particular attention to issues such as victim support, the quality of reporting, and confidence among members of the disability community about the way in which the criminal justice system treats them.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In October, the Police Service of Northern Ireland launched an online campaign after 44 disability hate crimes were recorded over a six-month period. Two years ago, the PSNI contacted the charity Leonard Cheshire Disability—which the Solicitor General will know—which has set up an advocacy scheme to help disabled people to gain access to the criminal justice system. Does the Solicitor General feel that he should consider similar action?

**The Solicitor General**: I commend the work of Leonard Cheshire Disability. In 2012, 65,000 cases involving a disability hate element in England and Wales were recorded in the national crime survey, but there is a big gap between that figure and the number of prosecutions, and I want that to change.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I may be bending the supplementary matter a little, Mr Speaker, but what steps is the Crown Prosecution Service taking to ensure the reliability of evidence relating to crimes allegedly committed 30 to 40 years ago?

**Mr Speaker**: No, that is not a stretching of the question; it is a departure from it. Ingenious, but flawed on this occasion.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The sad reality is that hate crime is a growing problem. A young Muslim woman, Ruhi Rehman, was racially abused when travelling on the metro in my home town of Newcastle on Saturday. Thankfully, her attacker was chased off by outraged passengers, but not everyone is fortunate enough to have “Geordie angels”. More than 27% of prosecutions for hate crimes are currently failing because of victim issues, a significant

rise since 2010. Do the Government share my concern that victims are being let down, and that serious crimes are going unpunished as a result?

**The Solicitor General**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that case. When I attended a hate crime training conference at the College of Policing a few weeks ago, not only disability hate crime but the type of hate crime to which she has referred was very much on the agenda. She will be glad to know that the CPS is enhancing training for all the leaders in their regions, which I think will result in a renewed emphasis on the need to make victims confident that the system will work for them rather than against them.

### Communications Data (Use in Prosecutions)

3. **Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of communications data in securing prosecutions. [902344]

4. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of communications data in securing prosecutions. [902345]

8. **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of communications data in securing prosecutions. [902349]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright)**: Communications data are an essential form of evidence used in prosecutions across the full spectrum of criminal offences, including terrorism, serious and organised crime, child sexual abuse, murder and rape. It is important for that capability to be maintained and modernised, which is why the Government have published the draft Investigatory Powers Bill.

**Lucy Frazer**: In the light of that, does the Attorney General agree that we need to continue to improve our communications data capability?

**The Attorney General**: I do agree with my hon. and learned Friend. It is important to recognise that the cases in which evidence of this kind is very significant range well beyond terrorism cases. For example, some 95% of CPS investigations of serious and organised crime involve communications data.

**Karl McCartney**: Can my right hon. and learned Friend assure me that any agency of Government, or indeed Parliament, such as the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, should not seek to protect its most senior management from legal action and/or prosecution by claiming that communications data are no longer available after 30 days, but instead should strive to be completely transparent and, when receiving requests for such data, make them available?

**The Attorney General**: Mr Speaker, I am sure you would not want me to wade into the details of that case, and I am obviously not in a position to do so anyway, but I would say that all organisations should take very seriously their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act and all other legislation.

**Iain Stewart:** In addition to the offences to which my right hon. and learned Friend has already alluded, could communications data not also help secure prosecutions in areas such as stalking and sexual grooming?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a large range of offences to which this might be relevant—essentially, types of offending where whether someone communicated with another person and where they were when they did so is relevant. One can think of conspiracies of all kinds, cases involving paedophile rings or drug-smuggling operations, harassment, which he mentioned, witness intimidation or even something as diverse as insider trading. There is a huge range of offending that we need to deal with in this way.

12. [902354] **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): The outrage on the streets of Paris and the seven foiled plots that have kept people safe in the UK show there should be no safe place online for terrorists and those who wish to do us harm. What additional measures can be taken to make sure that everyone in the UK remains safe from this threat?

**The Attorney General:** Again, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not sustainable to have a situation where a terrorist atrocity plotted by telephone can be understood and intercepted but one plotted over WhatsApp cannot. The measures in the draft Investigatory Powers Bill are entirely necessary, therefore, to avoid the kinds of atrocities he describes.

### Stalking and Harassment Cases

5. **Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service has taken to enable its prosecutors effectively to prosecute stalking and harassment cases. [902346]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** The CPS launched a joint stalking protocol with the police in September 2014, and has revised its legal guidance to prosecutors and delivered training on the new stalking offences, which led to a 15.1% rise in the level of prosecutions last year. The CPS continues to work closely with the police and voluntary sector to increase and improve prosecutions.

**Nusrat Ghani:** The national stalking helpline responded to 2,800 calls last year and frequently speaks to victims of stalking and harassment where restraining orders are not given or where ineffective restraining orders are given following a trial. It already takes the average victim 100 incidents of harassment before they go to the police. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that stalking and harassment are serious offences that can lead to serious sexual assault and violent offences, including murder? What more can be done to address this serious and often hidden problem?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the seriousness of stalking—it is no joke—and I join her in commending the work of the organisation she mentioned. The CPS legal guidance on this crime urges prosecutors to apply for restraining orders on

conviction and, where appropriate, on acquittal too. It is vital that we deal with this serious crime in a way that protects victims and deters perpetrators.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): There is concern that the new stalking provisions are not being used and that harassment provisions are being used instead. Will my hon. and learned Friend indicate that the seriousness of the offence should be reflected in the use of stalking charges rather than harassment charges?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend speaks with experience from her practice in criminal law. I was a member of the all-party group on stalking and harassment, together with Mr Elfyn Llwyd, the former Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, and we said then it was vital that the law be used to its full extent. There is a non-exhaustive list of types of stalking behaviour. This means that prosecutors and the police should be looking at such cases in a wide way and applying the full extent of the law wherever appropriate.

### Human Rights Act 1998

6. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What discussions he has had with his ministerial colleagues on developing proposals for reform of the Human Rights Act 1998. [902347]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** I regularly meet ministerial colleagues to discuss important issues of common interest, including on domestic and international human rights law. I cannot talk about the legal content of those discussions, because, as the House knows, by convention, whether Law Officers have given advice is not disclosed outside Government.

**Jeff Smith:** Does the Attorney General agree with his predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who said that the European convention on human rights is “the single most important legal and political instrument for promoting human rights on our planet”?

**The Attorney General:** As I have said a number of times, I have no quarrel whatever with the wording of the European convention on human rights; what I disagree with is the way in which that document has subsequently been interpreted by the Strasbourg Court. That is what the Government want to do something about.

14. [902356] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), a former Justice Minister and, in the week, a resident of Acton, has said:

“I would definitely not want Britain to withdraw from the Convention because it would appear as though the UK was no longer as committed to Human Rights as it in fact is. This would damage our country’s reputation.”

Just how will the Attorney General ensure that the Government’s plans to scrap the convention will not weaken the rights of the ordinary British citizen?

**The Attorney General:** Again, it is important to be clear about what we are talking about. There is a distinction to be made between the Human Rights Act,

which we fully intend to get rid of, and the convention, which we do not intend to leave unless we have to. We must do something to ensure that decisions on, for example, who has the franchise in British elections are taken by this House and not by the Court in Strasbourg. Those are the decisions we need to do something about. Of course this country will remain committed to human rights, with or without the Human Rights Act.

I must also point out to the hon. Lady that the Conservative party, in government, has been responsible not only for reducing the length of pre-charge detention to 28 days and for abolishing identity cards—both in response to illiberal measures passed by a Labour Government—but also for introducing the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and many other things that clearly demonstrate our commitment to human rights.

**Mr Speaker:** That is extremely helpful, but I have concluded over a period that prolixity and lawyers are inseparable.

**Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con):** Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, if we repealed the Human Rights Act—and even if we withdrew from the European convention on human rights—there is no provision whatever in the statute of the Council of Europe that would automatically force the United Kingdom to leave the Council of Europe?

**The Attorney General:** We will be discussing with our fellow members of the Council of Europe how we might reach a better settlement in relation to the Strasbourg Court's jurisprudence. In those discussions, I fully expect that other members of the Council of Europe will wish us to remain within the organisation.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** Can the Attorney General reassure the House that a British Bill of Rights would not only protect our existing rights, which are essential in a modern democratic society, but protect us against abuse of the system and the misuse of human rights laws?

**The Attorney General:** I do think that that is the objective. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that there is a real danger to support for human rights, which we wish to see as widespread and full-throated in this country, if it appears to many of our constituents that the concept is being abused through the sorts of cases that none of us fully believes to be genuine human rights cases. We must do something about that.

**Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP):** As part of developing these proposals, the question of whether the new British Bill of Rights will have legal application in Scotland is absolutely crucial to Scotland's constitutional settlement. Can the Attorney General give me an indication of whether it will apply in Scotland, and if it will, does he agree that a legislative consent motion would be required from the Scottish Parliament to give it that legal application?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Gentleman and I have already discussed the question of consultation with the Scottish authorities, and I am fully in favour—as are colleagues in the Ministry of Justice—of ensuring that the devolved Administrations are fully engaged in

that consultation process. As to whether a legislative consent motion would be required, that would depend entirely on the nature of the proposals. We have not yet seen them, and it is important that we should consider them properly when we do.

### Crown Prosecution Service: Funding

7. **Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab):** What steps he has taken to ensure that the measures relating to the Law Officers Department in the comprehensive spending review enable the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute cases effectively.

[902348]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** Throughout the spending review process, I have been keen to ensure that, while saving money wherever possible, the CPS received sufficient funding to prosecute its current case load effectively. I believe that the settlement we have achieved does indeed do that, and I particularly welcome the £4.4 million that has been ring-fenced for the CPS counter-terrorism division, which will nearly double in size, and the extra funding provided to recruit 100 additional prosecutors to deal with serious sexual offences.

**Keir Starmer:** Should I need to declare an interest, I should tell the House that I was the head of the Crown Prosecution Service for five years, from 2008 to 2013.

One of the reasons that the CPS has coped well with the cuts in the past five years is that the case load of referrals from the police has gone down. What level of assurance can the Attorney General give me that if the case load goes up significantly or becomes more complex, further funding will be made available to enable the CPS to carry out its service?

**The Attorney General:** As the hon. and learned Gentleman would expect, if circumstances change in that regard, we will speak to the Treasury again about money to be made available to deal with them. The settlement takes account of, and helps us to deal with, the substantial changes and significant shifts in the case load that took place over the time when he was Director of Public Prosecutions and subsequently.

**Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con):** Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that priority is given to dealing with the woeful state of the CPS IT system, which has been a long-running problem for many years? Secondly, will he ensure that all changes to CPS systems to ensure efficiency are aligned with the proposals that Sir Brian Leveson made in his report for overall efficiencies within the criminal justice system?

**The Attorney General:** Yes, certainly. On my hon. Friend's latter point, he will know that the CPS has been closely involved with the Leveson review, and a large number of Sir Brian's conclusions come from what he has been told by the CPS. As my hon. Friend will have noticed, some £700 million was made available for digitalisation of the courts in the spending settlement announced yesterday, through the Ministry of Justice settlement. The CPS will benefit from and contribute to that process immensely.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): At the beginning of the year, the DPP asked the Attorney General for an extra £50 million to plug the funding gap so that the CPS could properly prosecute complex matters, such as historical sex cases. He confirmed to this House that he was talking to the Treasury about this extra funding and that he thought it would understand the case he was making, but there was no mention in yesterday's autumn statement of this extra, special funding for historical sex cases. What went wrong?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Gentleman should pay close attention to what the CPS is saying now, as much as to what it said then. Let me tell him what it said yesterday in response to the settlement. It said:

"This settlement will allow the CPS to respond to a changing caseload and the significant increase in complex and sensitive cases, such as terrorism, rape and serious sexual assaults and child sex abuse."

The CPS is making the same point that I am making today about this settlement: it is a settlement that recognises the need to deal with precisely the type of increase in case load that he is talking about.

#### Crown Prosecution Service: Costs of Errors

10. **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What estimate he has made of the annual cost to the public purse of avoidable errors by the Crown Prosecution Service. [902351]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** The CPS does not maintain a central record of the number or value of wasted costs orders, but I can tell my hon. and learned Friend that the total value of costs awarded against the CPS in the last financial year, of which wasted costs orders are a mere subset, amounted to just over £1 million, which was about 0.18% of overall expenditure.

**Stephen Phillips:** I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Terry Boston, a solicitor in my constituency, said the following in an email to me last week:

"I am becoming more and more concerned about justice in this country. The reason for this is the blatant failure of the CPS and their one line cover all excuse, 'We are short of staff.'"

I appreciate, as does Mr Boston, that savings have had to be made, but can my hon. and learned Friend assure the House that the CPS does have sufficient staff in place, both nationally and in Lincolnshire, to perform its functions?

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his question. I can assure him that the CPS does indeed have sufficient staff in place to properly do its work. The CPS conviction rate in his region last year was 84.2%, which is slightly higher than the national average.

#### Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes

11. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to improve the conviction rate for anti-Semitic hate crimes; and if he will make a statement. [902352]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** New CPS legal guidance for prosecutors on anti-Semitic hate crimes was published in May, and in addition the CPS is implementing its religiously aggravated and anti-Semitic crime action plan, which seeks to raise awareness of these cases and to improve the reporting of such hate crimes. This has been welcomed by the all-party group against antisemitism.

**Michael Fabricant:** My hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the incidence of anti-Semitic hate crime is going up, particularly in Muslim areas, unfortunately. Can he expand a little further on his earlier answer about the role of the CPS in educating the police on these matters?

**The Solicitor General:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the consistent work that he has done over the years to highlight that obscene crime. I am sad to say that there are spikes in that type of offending when particular political events occur. The CPS is aware of it, as are the police, and that type of hate crime was very much on the agenda of the national training conference at Ryton.

#### WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

*The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—*  
**Gender Pay Gap**

1. **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the gender pay gap; and if she will make a statement. [902379]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan):** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I could not be clearer: we want to consign the gender pay gap to the history books. We are therefore introducing new regulations that will require larger employers to publish their gender pay gap information. That will encourage companies to take action and to drive change on this important issue. Transparency is important, and we also want to tackle the underlying causes of the gap, which is why I want to see girls entering the broadest range of careers and reaching the top of their professions.

**Mr Allen:** Will the Secretary of State, who I know cares about this issue, symbolically forgo her salary from 9 November until the end of the calendar year so that she knows from personal experience what it feels like to do the work of a male colleague but for 20% less salary? Does she not think that all Governments have failed in this field, and that now is the time not to have declarations about change over a generation, but to seize the legislative agenda, for which she would have massive support across the House, finally to bring pay equality to women in our country?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for the question, but I am not interested in tokenistic gestures. He can give up his salary if he feels so strongly about it and wants to make a statement. The important thing is that this Government are taking action on the issue, which his party did not do in 13 years of government.

He is right to say that the matter now needs to be tackled by legislation, and the Government will publish regulations shortly to make that happen.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Women over 40 endure the biggest gender pay gap. What specific policies does the Minister have to address that problem?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for her question, and I know her Committee will be considering this area. She may be interested to know that figures published earlier this month show a 1.6 percentage point drop in the gender pay gap for women aged between 40 and 49, and that is repeated in the over-50s and the over-60s. She is absolutely right to say that this matter needs to be tackled. I have mentioned the regulations, which will provide the necessary transparency. We are also doing a lot of work on how we can help women to juggle caring responsibilities, which come when they are older. Of course they can also request flexible working as introduced by this Government.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): At the gender gap presentation the other evening we heard how gender diversity must not be an add-on to another role, and yet it seems that, as Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Lady has had her role added on. What action will she take to ensure that there is someone dedicated to the task in every Department to get rid of the gender gap?

**Nicky Morgan:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was a Member of this House in the last Parliament when I was Minister for Women and Equalities. I was delighted to take the role with me into this Parliament. In fact, I have been Minister for Women and Equalities longer than I have been Secretary of State for Education. It is a role about which I feel passionate. Just by looking at the array of Ministers on the Front Bench today, he will see that this Government take very seriously their equalities responsibilities. Whether we are talking about the gender pay gap or any other matter, those responsibilities run right the way through all the Departments in this Government.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Will the Minister put in the Library the gender pay gap of all Government Departments and all Government quangos, because an awful lot of Government quangos have a gender pay gap? Perhaps the Government should sort out their own house first, before they go round lecturing everyone else.

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Gentleman tempts me very much. He might be interested to know that the overall gender pay gap for all civil service employees fell from 13.6% in 2014 to 12.8% in March 2014. The gender pay gap in the Department for Education is 9% and it is 11% in the Ministry of Justice. The regulations that we are publishing will also apply to the public sector. As that information is public, I would be very happy to write to him with it.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): According to figures published last week in the annual survey of hours and earnings, the gender pay gap in the

UK fell by 0.8 percentage points to 9.5%. However, in Scotland, the gap dropped by 1.8 percentage points to 7.5%. Will the Minister learn lessons from the action taken by the Scottish Government who are cutting the gender pay gap further and faster?

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Lady is right to say that the gender pay gap in Scotland is lower, and that is why I was delighted to visit Scotland recently to meet counterparts in the Scottish Government, successful female entrepreneurs and Professor Lesley Sawers, who has, at the request of the UK Government, been doing a lot of work in Scotland on women in enterprise. One reason we are stronger together is that we can all learn lessons from each other.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): At 35%, the gender pay gap in the finance and insurance sectors is the biggest in the land. What are the Government doing to tackle that?

**Nicky Morgan:** I am delighted to say that those sectors are already taking responsibility for tackling the issue. They are learning from the Government's voluntary approach to women on boards, and I am pleased that Jayne-Anne Gadhia from the finance sector and others in the insurance sector have recently launched voluntary initiatives to ensure that companies publish their own gender pay gap. Larger companies will, of course, also be caught by the regulations that we are due to publish shortly.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): The Minister has rightly highlighted the fact that the public sector is very good at closing the gender pay gap, in comparison with the private sector. The Resolution Foundation estimates that care workers are collectively paid £130 million below the national minimum wage because of employers' failure to pay for travel time and deductions for essentials such as uniforms, mobile phones and petrol. What steps is the Minister taking to close the pay gap in that part of the private sector, in which 78% of workers are women?

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Lady is right to point out that certain sectors—not only care, but clerical, secretarial and others—are very female dominated, which contributes to the ongoing gender pay gap. That is why I welcome the focus, which we will come to in later questions, on raising girls' aspirations for their jobs and careers. The Government are committed to enforcing the national minimum wage, and only recently we published the names of employers who do not pay their employees the national minimum wage. That is unacceptable and we will continue to make that information public.

### Body Confidence in Young People

2. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage body confidence in young people. [902380]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):** The Government have continued the work started under the coalition Government to encourage body confidence with the aim of promoting young people's media literacy and resilience, supporting good practice and raising

awareness. For example, in March we started work with the PSHE Association to publish guidance on teaching about body image using accredited resources.

**Caroline Nokes:** Next week, models, agents, academics and professionals are coming to Parliament to discuss what the fashion industry can do to lead the way in promoting positive healthy ideals for young people. Does my hon. Friend agree that a collaborative approach is essential if we are to tackle the issue of low body confidence and lack of self-esteem that affects too many young people?

**Caroline Dinanage:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the fantastic work that she does as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on body image. She has been a fantastic champion on this important issue and she is absolutely right that effective change will be achieved only by co-operation and collaboration. I recently met the British Fashion Council and the campaign group All Walks Beyond the Catwalk to discuss how we can make this happen for the good of those who are in the fashion industry, those who aspire to it and, most importantly, those who are influenced by it.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I was very pleased that the Minister mentioned personal, social, health and economic education. Is it not the case that establishing good-quality PSHE on a statutory basis in all schools will help instil good body confidence in young people and also keep them safe from inappropriate relationships, which often happen when children and young people have low self-esteem?

**Caroline Dinanage:** The fact that a subject is a statutory requirement does not mean that it is taught well, and we want all schools to put high-quality PSHE education at the heart of their curriculum so that all young people leave school prepared for life in modern Britain. The majority of schools and teachers already recognise the importance of good PSHE education and naturally know that healthy, resilient and confident pupils are better placed to achieve academically and fulfil their potential in life.

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): As the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) will know, it is frequently thought that this problem only affects young women, but it affects boys and young men as well. Will my hon. Friend the Minister assure the House that she has not lost sight of that and tell us a little more about what the Government are doing in that regard?

**Caroline Dinanage:** My hon. and learned Friend makes an excellent point. There is even a name for the problem; it is called “manxiety”. We are not blind to the fact that this issue affects an increasing number of young men and boys, which is reflected in the worrying increase in the use of steroids. That is why the Government’s body confidence work is blind to gender and tackles the problem by dealing equally with boys and girls.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Part of body confidence can be better understanding of what our bodies are for. What will the Minister do to promote breastfeeding in the PSHE curriculum?

**Caroline Dinanage:** It is up to schools to decide; we do not want to give them a prescriptive list or tell them how to teach PSHE. As I said, we want our young people to leave school prepared for life in modern Britain, with a resilient and healthy attitude to life, and breastfeeding is clearly a strong part of that.

### School Attainment Levels

3. **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): What assessment she has made of the difference in levels of attainment between boys and girls at school. [902381]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan):** Thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers across the country, more pupils—boys and girls—are getting the education they deserve. Girls outperform boys on average at both primary and secondary school, but while girls have higher attainment, they are less likely to pursue subjects such as physics and maths. As Education Secretary, I am aware of all those issues and determined to tackle them.

**Will Quince:** I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but the sad reality is that, in 2014, 10% fewer boys attained A\* to C at GCSE, including maths and English. What steps will she take as Minister for Women and Equalities and Education Secretary to close this gender gap and help boys to achieve their full potential?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. There is certainly more that we need to do to tackle underachievement among boys, especially among white working-class boys, I am sorry to say. The Chancellor has committed to the pupil premium, worth £2.5 billion, for the rest of this Parliament; a quarter of white British boys are eligible for that funding. We need to do more to explain to young men the careers that are out there and why they will need skills such as maths, but we also need to think about parental engagement—a lot of the messages will come from home that education is very valuable and that boys as well as girls need to focus in school.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Addressing the education attainment gap is important, but equally important is addressing the gap in work. A recent event held in Northern Ireland by the STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—industries showed that men outnumber women three to one in the workforce. What steps have been taken to reduce the gender gap, not only in education, but in wider employment?

**Nicky Morgan:** I am delighted to hear about that successful event. That illustrates the point I was making about needing to inspire young people—boys and girls—about the careers that are out there and the importance of STEM subjects. I am delighted to say that maths is now the most popular subject at A-level, and there have been 12,000 more STEM A-level entries from girls since the start of the last Parliament, but there is a long way to go.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend considered whether the disparity between the numbers of male and female teachers, especially in primary schools, is affecting the attainment level of boys?

**Nicky Morgan:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Young people benefit from strong role models, and we have an excellent workforce in our primary schools, with 82% of teaching in those schools rated good or outstanding. I would like to see more male teachers; equally, I would like to see more female headteachers in our secondary schools.

#### Freedom to Donate Campaign

4. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health on the Freedom to Donate campaign; and if she will make a statement. [902382]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison):** Making sure that the blood supply is safe is an absolute priority. Donor deferral for men who have sex with men was changed from lifetime to 12 months in 2011, but four years later it is time to look again at the question. Public Health England has just undertaken an anonymous survey of donors, and I am pleased to say that SaBTO—the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs—will review the issue in 2016.

**Michael Fabricant:** The safety of blood is of course paramount, but the Minister will know that when I met her in December 2014 to discuss the issue, there were two matters about which I was very disturbed. One was someone from the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs saying that the word of gay people was somehow less valuable than the word of straight people—that was disgraceful. Secondly, the Minister promised me that survey work would be available at the time of the general election, but when I put down a written question about it, she said that, in fact, such survey work was not being done—although she now says it is. I felt that she misled me at the time. Can she say more about how we are finally going to achieve equality in this matter? Many clinicians feel it is long overdue.

**Jane Ellison:** My hon. Friend and I did have a meeting, and I can confirm that the Public Health England survey has been undertaken and is currently being analysed. I do not recall that an official made that point. It is important to put it on the record that the blood service does not discriminate on sexual orientation: lesbians are free to give blood and their blood donations are much appreciated. The deferral period is based on sexual activity and it applies to a number of groups other than men who have sex with men. As I say, SaBTO will review the issue in the light of the PHE survey. I am always happy to discuss this with my hon. Friend.

#### Safety of Women in Public Spaces

6. **Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to ensure the safety of women in public spaces. [902384]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley):** This Government are clear that women should be confident that they are safe in public spaces. We are bearing down on those

whose criminal actions impinge on this right. We have made progress. Last year Crown Prosecution Service data showed the highest ever number of convictions for crimes of violence against women and girls. We are refreshing the cross-Government VAWG strategy, including providing more options on intervention to prevent harassment, assault and abuse.

**Karin Smyth:** Bristol's women's commission is leading the campaign to make Bristol a zero-tolerance city towards gender-based violence and exploitation. How can the Government help Bristol and other cities achieve a zero-tolerance approach?

**Karen Bradley:** I am very pleased to hear about the work taking place in Bristol. This Government are committed, as I have said, to making sure that violence against women and girls is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in society. I look forward to hear more about the work being done in Bristol.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital to provide extra protection for victims of stalking—who are often also affected by domestic violence and who are sometimes targeted and followed from family courts—in order to bring more perpetrators to justice?

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Testimony that I have heard from victims of stalking shows the incredibly invasive nature of this crime and how damaging it is psychologically and emotionally. We are determined to tackle it, including by introducing the domestic abuse coercive control offence, which we passed in the Serious Crime Act 2015 and which we will be commencing shortly, to make sure that all domestic abuse is an offence and that the police have the weapons they need.

19. [902397] **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Councillor Michael Pavey of Brent council organised a fantastic event recently on women's safety, female genital mutilation and domestic violence. He was disappointed, however, that the audience was overwhelmingly female. Does the Minister have any ideas about how to increase awareness of these issues among men, especially young men?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Lady makes a very important point, and as the Minister with responsibility for preventing abuse and exploitation I know that far too often I go to events where the audience is predominantly, if not exclusively, female. Yesterday, however, I was pleased to support the white ribbon campaign, which is the campaign for men against violence against women. The more we can do with such campaigns and more awareness raising, the more we can encourage people to understand that this is an issue that affects all members of society, no matter what their gender.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What assessment has been made of the impact of the two new specific offences introduced in 2012 of stalking and stalking involving fear of violence, adding protection for victims and also bringing perpetrators to justice?

**Karen Bradley:** We have seen some success with the stalking offences that my hon. Friend asks about. We are seeing more and more police forces using the stalking offences and making sure that victims are protected. It is so important that we protect victims and give them the support they need, and make sure that perpetrators are dealt with in such a way that they cannot get to those victims and that they suffer the right penalties.

**Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab):** Black, Asian and minority ethnic women face particularly high incidences of violence and abuse, and research the other day from the charity Tell MAMA showed that incidents of hate crime against Muslims had risen by more than 300% since the appalling attacks in Paris, and particularly against Muslim women. What steps can the Minister take to stamp out gender, faith and racially motivated violence against women and girls?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Lady will know that the Government recently announced that we are publishing new data sets to show racially motivated hate crime, particularly hate crime against Muslims, because we agree that we need to understand the scale of the problem and we need to make sure it is absolutely clear that it is not acceptable. There can be no excuse in any religious text for hatred and nobody should think they can get away with it.

**Kate Green:** I am grateful to the Minister. Does she recognise that the women's sector is under enormous pressure, particularly specialist organisations that, for example, support black, Asian and minority ethnic women? The charity Eaves was forced to close earlier this month, Imkaan reports that 67% of its members are uncertain about the future sustainability of their funding, and generic providers are increasingly being commissioned to provide specialist services. Is it not time for a proper, sustainable funding strategy for services for victims of domestic and sexual violence, rather than gimmicky short-term fixes such as the tampon tax, which only women pay for?

**Karen Bradley:** It is a shame that the hon. Lady makes that comment. While we are in the position of having to pay that VAT, it is right that we use it to provide additional support for the services in question, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) for coming up with the idea. The hon. Lady is quite right that we need those specialist services, but it is not that many weeks since the Labour party voted for a 10% cut in police funding. The Conservative party has maintained police funding, which will make sure that victims of these horrendous crimes get the support they need.

### Gender Economic Inequality

7. **Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab):** What steps she is taking to reduce gender economic inequality. [902385]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan):** As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at our party conference last month, we cannot have true opportunity without real equality. I am very proud that we now have more women in work, more women on

boards and the lowest pay gap on record across the UK, but we must continue to make progress. Women will be the main beneficiaries of the new national living wage and the rise in the personal allowance.

**Paul Blomfield:** I thank the Minister for that response, but as she acknowledged in response to an earlier question, the overwhelming majority of care workers are women, and they face low pay, zero-hours contracts and non-payment of travel time as a consequence of financial pressures on the sector. Professor Martin Green, the chief executive of Care England, among others, is clear that yesterday's announcement by the Chancellor will not plug the funding gap in the care sector. What will the Minister do to secure a fair deal for care workers?

**Nicky Morgan:** One of the greatest things we can do is introduce the national living wage, which will proportionately benefit more women than men, and employers in the care sector and other employers will have to pay it.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that people should be able to pursue their career without worrying about their sex, sexuality or sexual identity, and that everyone has the right to pursue a full role in the workplace?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend, who puts it really well. I particularly want to answer that question in the context of transgender people, who often face discrimination in the workplace as well as in their day-to-day lives. That is why I am today publishing guidance for employers and service providers to improve knowledge and understanding about supporting those who are transgender. It is an important step, but I want us to continue to raise awareness of the issues and discrimination facing many transgender and non-binary people.

### STEM Subjects

8. **Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** What support the Government is providing to encourage more girls to choose STEM subjects in schools. [902386]

11. **Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con):** What support the Government is providing to encourage more girls to choose STEM subjects in schools. [902389]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):** The Government are determined to increase the number of young people, particularly girls, studying science, technology, engineering and maths. There have been 12,000 more STEM A-level entries for girls over the last five years, but of course more needs to be done. That is why we are supporting schools through professional development and enrichment activities, including the Stimulating Physics Network, STEMNET and the inspiring Your Life campaign, which will transform perceptions of science and maths.

**Chris Green:** I thank the Minister for her reply. As a former engineer, I know at first hand the benefits of choosing STEM subjects in schools, and I am pleased

that the Government are encouraging more girls into the area. Does the Minister agree that alongside the promotion of STEM in schools, it is vital that young people, particularly girls, receive good careers advice and guidance so that they can go on to succeed in the STEM-related industries?

**Caroline Dinéage:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We know that girls often outperform boys in STEM subjects at school but do not necessarily go on to study those subjects at A-level or go into STEM careers. That is why I am delighted that we have set up the new Careers & Enterprise Company, which will strengthen the links between employers and schools and hopefully inspire the next generation of engineers by showing them just how interesting and varied careers in engineering can be.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** In September, Medway's new engineering university technical college opened, and I am thrilled that many local girls chose to be part of the first intake. To what extent has industry been involved in the Your Life campaign to inspire more girls to consider a career in STEM?

**Caroline Dinéage:** As my hon. Friend outlines, Your Life is a fantastic industry-led and industry-funded campaign. Everyone is committed to inspiring the next generation of boys, but particularly girls, in the importance of STEM. I experienced that at first hand when I visited the Ford motor company in Dagenham—the spiritual home of the fight for equal pay—and saw a team of schoolgirls racing cars around its test track and really understanding the value and excitement of careers in STEM.

### Women Engineers

9. **Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): What steps she is taking to encourage more women to become engineers. [902387]

**The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson):** The Government have supported a range of initiatives aimed at inspiring young people, including many girls, to take up engineering. Since 2010 the number of women starting engineering and manufacturing apprenticeships has trebled to 4,800. I am pleased that at the National Physical Laboratory in my hon. Friend's constituency over half the apprentices are female. By protecting the science budget we are ensuring a strong science and engineering base that will benefit the entire country.

**Dr Mathias:** I urge the Minister to come to the NPL with me, because there are exciting projects there with graduates. I also invite him to Jack and Jill nursery school in my constituency, which is promoting engineering for six and seven-year-olds by inviting our great inventor Trevor Baylis to show them what can be done with Meccano sets. Will the Minister join me in asking toy manufacturers to make these kits for five-year-olds and upwards, instead of eight-year-olds and upwards, because we start really young in Twickenham?

**Joseph Johnson:** I am always delighted to go to Twickenham. I am delighted also to welcome this very successful initiative. Twickenham, in this respect, is part of a much bigger national story in which we have more

women-led businesses than ever before—about 1 million. As of 2014, 20% of all small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK are now majority led by women—an increase of 170,000 on the number in 2010.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is really important to show young girls and boys the fantastic careers that engineering provides. To do that specifically for girls, we need engineering companies to engage with schools. What discussions is the Minister having with other Ministers to ensure that there is a central point where engineering companies can find the schools they can engage with?

**Joseph Johnson:** I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Education in this respect. The Careers & Enterprise Company that is set up in the Department for Education plays precisely the co-ordinating role that the hon. Lady mentions.

### Immigration Detention of Pregnant Women

10. **Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Home Secretary on immigration detention of pregnant women. [902388]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley):** Published Home Office policy states that pregnant women should not usually be detained unless there is a prospect of early safe removal. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary asked Stephen Shaw, the former prisons and probation ombudsman for England and Wales, to review the detention of vulnerable individuals. His report and the Government response will be published before the Immigration Bill completes its passage through Parliament.

**Mrs Spelman:** I welcome the Minister's statement. In 2014, 99 pregnant women were detained at Yarl's Wood, and I understand that there are some remaining cases. Will the Minister use her good offices to expedite those cases?

**Karen Bradley:** I will make sure that the Home Office looks carefully at all the cases my right hon. Friend has raised. I repeat that pregnant women should not routinely be detained. The Home Office is currently considering Stephen Shaw's review on detainee welfare, and we will publish his report before the Immigration Bill completes its passage.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I agree with the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman). This is a big problem, but it is about the providers. What discussions will the Minister have with Serco, Mitie, G4S and other providers about the detention of pregnant women?

**Karen Bradley:** The Home Office has regular discussions with all providers to make sure that appropriate treatment is given to all vulnerable people held in detention. I repeat that the Stephen Shaw review will be published shortly.

### Boards of Public Institutions: Representation of Women

12. **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the representation of women on the boards of public institutions. [902390]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinéage):**

We are making real progress in increasing the number of women on public boards, with 44% of new appointments going to women last year, up from 39% in the previous year. Steps to increase diversity include streamlining the application process and increasing awareness of opportunities via a central website and social media.

**David Mowat:** There has been success in non-executive roles on boards but much less success in decision-making, operational roles. Only 8% of FTSE directors are women

in executive positions. Does the Minister agree that quotas that focus on the wrong metric could undermine progress in this key area, which is judge and jury of success in this regard?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend that there is an abundance of talented women who have the right skills and experience for board positions. Government and business must work together to level the playing field and encourage those women to work their way up the executive pipeline. That is why the Government will establish a new review focusing on that all-important executive layer in FTSE 350 companies.

## Syria

10.30 am

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** Mr Speaker, I said I would respond personally to the Foreign Affairs Committee report on extending British military operations to Syria. I have done so today, and copies of my response have been made available to every Member of the House.

The Committee produced a comprehensive report that asked a series of important questions. I have tried to listen very carefully to the questions and views expressed by Members on both sides of the House, and I want to answer all the relevant questions today. There are different ways of putting them, but they boil down to this: why? Why us? Why now? Is what we are contemplating legal? Where are the ground troops to help us achieve our objectives? What is the strategy that brings together everything we are doing, particularly in Syria? Is there an end to this conflict, and is there a plan for what follows?

Let me deal with each of those questions as directly as I can. First, why? The reason for acting is the very direct threat that ISIL poses to our country and to our way of life. ISIL has attacked Ankara, Beirut and, of course, Paris, as well as likely blowing up a Russian plane with 224 people on board. It has already taken the lives of British hostages, and inspired the worst terrorist attack against British people since 7/7, on the beaches of Tunisia—and, crucially, it has repeatedly tried to attack us right here in Britain. In the last 12 months, our police and security services have disrupted no fewer than seven terrorist plots to attack the UK, every one of which was either linked to ISIL or inspired by its propaganda, so I am in no doubt that it is in our national interest for action to be taken to stop it—and stopping it means taking action in Syria, because Raqqa is its headquarters.

But why us? My first responsibility as Prime Minister—and our first job in this House—is to keep the British people safe. We have the assets to do that and we can significantly extend the capabilities of the international coalition forces. That is one reason why members of the international coalition, including President Obama and President Hollande, have made it clear to me that they want Britain to stand with them in joining in air strikes in Syria, as well as Iraq. These are our closest allies, and they want our help.

Partly, this is about our capabilities. As we are showing in Iraq, the RAF can carry out what is called “dynamic targeting”, whereby our pilots can strike the most difficult targets at rapid pace and with extraordinary precision, and provide vital battle-winning close air support to local forces on the ground. We have the Brimstone precision missile system, which enables us to strike accurately, with minimal collateral damage—something that even the Americans do not have. RAPTOR—the reconnaissance airborne pod for our Tornado aircraft—has no rival; it currently gathers 60% of the coalition’s entire tactical reconnaissance in Iraq, and it is also equipped for strikes. In addition, our Reaper drones are providing up to 30% of the intelligence in Syria, but they are not currently able to use their low-collateral, high-precision missile systems. We also have the proven ability to sustain our operations—not just for weeks, but, if necessary, for months into the future.

Of course we have those capabilities, but the most important answer to the question, “Why us?”, is, I believe, even more fundamental: we should not be content with outsourcing our security to our allies. If we believe that action can help protect us, then, with our allies, we should be part of that action, not standing aside from it. From that moral point comes a fundamental question: if we will not act now, when our friend and ally France has been struck in this way, then our allies in the world can be forgiven for asking, “If not now, when?”

That leads to the next question: why now? The first answer to that is, of course, because of the grave danger that ISIL poses to our security—a danger that has clearly intensified in recent weeks—but there are additional reasons why action now is so important. Just look at what has changed—not just the attack in Paris, but the fact that the world has come together and agreed a UN Security Council resolution. There is a real political process under way. This could lead to a new Government in Syria, with whom we can work to defeat ISIL for good. But as I explained to the House yesterday, we cannot wait for that to be complete before we begin acting to degrade ISIL and reducing its capability to attack us.

Let us be clear about the military objectives that we are pursuing. Yes, we want to defeat the terrorists by dismantling their networks, stopping their funding, targeting their training camps and taking out those plotting terrorist attacks against the UK, but there is a broader objective. For as long as ISIL can pedal the myth of a so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria, it will be a rallying call for Islamist extremists all around the world, and that makes us less safe. Just as we have reduced the scale and size of the so-called caliphate in Iraq—increasingly pushing it out of Iraq—so we need to do the same thing in Syria.

Indeed, another reason for action now is that the success in Iraq in squeezing the so-called caliphate is put at risk by our failure to act in Syria. This border is not recognised by ISIL, and we seriously hamper our efforts if we stop acting when we reach the Syrian border, so when we come to the question, “Why now?”, we have to ask ourselves whether the risks of inaction are greater than the risks of taking action. Every day we fail to act is a day when ISIL can grow stronger and more plots can be undertaken. That is why all the advice I have received—the military advice, the diplomatic advice and the security advice—all says, yes, that the risks of inaction are greater.

Some have asked specifically whether taking action could make the UK more of a target for ISIL attacks, so let me tell the House that the judgment of the director general of the Security Service and the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee is that the UK is already in the top tier of countries that ISIL is targeting, so I am clear that the only way to deal with that reality is to address the threat we face, and to do so now.

Let me turn to the question of legality. It is a long-standing constitutional convention that we do not publish our formal legal advice, but the document I have published today shows in some detail the clear legal basis for military action against ISIL in Syria. It is founded on the right of self-defence as recognised in article 51 of the United Nations charter. The right of self-defence may be exercised individually where it is necessary to the UK’s own defence, and of course collectively in the defence of our friends and allies.

The main basis of the global coalition's actions against ISIL in Syria is the collective self-defence of Iraq. Iraq has a legitimate Government—one that we support and help. There is a solid basis of evidence on which to conclude, first, that there is a direct link between the presence and activities of ISIL in Syria and its ongoing attack on Iraq, and secondly, that the Assad regime is unwilling and/or unable to take action necessary to prevent ISIL's continuing attack on Iraq, or indeed attacks on us. It is also clear that ISIL's campaign against the UK and our allies has reached the level of an "armed attack", such that force may lawfully be used in self-defence to prevent further atrocities being committed by ISIL.

This is further underscored by the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2249. We should be clear about what this resolution means and what it says. The whole world came together, including all five members of the Security Council, to agree this resolution unanimously. The resolution states that ISIL

"constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security".

It calls for member states to take "all necessary measures" to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL and, crucially, it says that we should

"eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria".

Turning to the question of which ground forces will assist us, in Iraq the answer is clear. We have the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish peshmerga. In Syria, the situation is more complex. However, as the report I am publishing today shows, we believe that there are around 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters, principally of the Free Syrian Army, who do not belong to extremist groups, and with whom we can co-ordinate attacks on ISIL.

In addition, Kurdish armed groups have shown themselves capable of taking territory, holding it and administering it, and, crucially, of relieving the suffering that the civilian population had endured under ISIL control. The Syrian Kurds have successfully defended Kurdish areas in northern Syria and retaken territory around the city of Kobane.

Moderate armed Sunni Arabs have proved capable of defending territory north of Aleppo. They stopped ISIL's attempts to capture the main humanitarian border crossing with Turkey and sweep into Idlib province. In the south, the Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army has consolidated its control over significant areas, and has worked to prevent terrorists from operating.

The people I have talked about are ground troops. They need our help; when they get it, they succeed, so in my view, we should do more to help from the air. Those who ask questions about ground troops are absolutely right to do so. The full answer cannot be achieved until there is a new Syrian Government who represent all the Syrian people—not just Sunni, Shi'a and Alawite, but Christian, Druze and others. It is this new Government who will be the natural partner for our forces in defeating ISIL for good. We cannot defeat ISIL simply from the air, or purely with military action alone. It requires a full political settlement. The question is: can we wait for that settlement before we take action? Again, my answer is no.

On the question of whether this action is part of an overall strategy, the answer is yes. Our approach has four pillars. First, our counter-extremism strategy means

that we have a comprehensive plan to prevent and foil plots at home, and to address the poisonous extremist ideology that is the root cause of the threat we face. The second pillar is our support for the diplomatic and political process. We should be clear about that process. Many people across this House have rightly said how vital it is to have all the key regional players around the table, including Iran and Russia. We are now seeing Iran and Saudi Arabia sitting around the same table as America and Russia, as well as France, Turkey and Britain. All of us are working towards the transition to a new Government in Syria.

The third pillar is the military action that I am describing to degrade ISIL and reduce the threat it poses; it is working in Iraq, and I believe that it can work in Syria. The fourth pillar is immediate humanitarian support and, even more crucially, longer-term stabilisation. The House has heard many times that Britain has so far given over £1.1 billion—by far the largest commitment of any European country, and second only to the United States of America. That is helping to reduce the need for Syrians to attempt the perilous journey to Europe. The donor conference that I am hosting in February together with Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the UN will help further.

The House is rightly asking more questions about whether there will be a proper post-conflict reconstruction effort to support a new Syrian Government when they emerge. Britain's answer to that question is absolutely yes. I can tell the House that Britain would be prepared to contribute at least another £1 billion for that task.

All these elements—counter-terrorism, political and diplomatic, military and humanitarian—need to happen together to achieve a long-term solution in Syria. We know that peace is a process, not an event. I am clear that it cannot be achieved through a military assault on ISIL alone; it also requires the removal of Assad through a political transition. But I am also clear about the sequencing that needs to take place. This is an ISIL-first strategy.

What of the end goal? The initial objective is to damage ISIL and reduce its capacity to do us harm. I believe that that can, in time, lead to its eradication. No one predicted ISIL's rise, and we should not accept that it is somehow impossible to bring it to an end. It is not what the people of Iraq and Syria want; it does not represent the true religion of Islam; and it is losing ground in Iraq, following losses in Sinjar and Baiji.

We are not naive about the complexity of the task. It will require patience and persistence, and our work will not be complete until we have reached our true end goal, which is having Governments in both Iraq and Syria who can command the confidence of all their peoples. In Syria, that ultimately means a Government without Assad. As Ban Ki-moon has said:

"Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism."

That applies so clearly to both Iraq and Syria.

As we discuss all these things, people also want to know that we have learned the lessons of previous conflicts. Whatever anyone thought of the Iraq war, terrible mistakes were made in its aftermath in dismantling the state and the institutions of that country. We must never make those mistakes again. The political process in Syria will, in time, deliver new leadership, and we must support that transition. We are not in the business of dismantling the Syrian state or its institutions.

[*The Prime Minister*]

In Libya, the state and its institutions had been hollowed out after 40 years of dictatorship. When the dictatorship went, the institutions rapidly collapsed. The big difference between Libya and Syria is that in Syria this time we have firm international commitment from all the backers of a future Syrian Government around the table at the Vienna talks. The commitment is clear: to preserve and develop the state in Syria, and allow a new representative Government to govern for all its people.

I have attempted to answer the main questions: why? Why now? Why us? Is it legal? What are the ground forces? Is there a strategy? What is the end point and plan for reconstruction? I know that this is a highly complex situation, and Members on all sides of the House will have other questions that I look forward to trying to answer this morning.

One question will be about the confused and confusing situation in Syria with regard to Russia's intervention. Let me reassure the House that the American-led combined air operations centre has a memorandum of understanding with the Russians. That enables daily contact and pragmatic military planning to ensure the safety of all coalition forces, and that would include our brave RAF pilots. Another question will be about whether we are taking sides in a Sunni versus Shi'a conflict, but that is simply not the case. Yes, ISIL is a predominantly Sunni organisation, but it is killing Sunni and Shi'a alike. Our vision for the future of Syria, as with Iraq, is not a sectarian entity, but one that is governed in the interests of all its people. We therefore wholeheartedly welcome the presence of states with both Sunni and Shi'a majorities at the Vienna talks, and their support for international action both against ISIL and towards a diplomatic solution in Syria.

The House will also want to know what we are doing about the financing of ISIL. The document sets that out; it includes intercepting smugglers, sealing borders, and enforcing sanctions to stop people trading with ISIL. Ultimately, ISIL is able to generate income through its control of territory, so although we are working with international partners to squeeze the finances wherever we can, it is the rolling back of ISIL's territory that will ultimately cut off its finances.

Two of the most complex questions in an undoubtedly complex situation are these. First, will acting against ISIL in Syria help to bring about transition? I believe the answer is yes, not least because there cannot be genuine transition without maintaining the territorial integrity of Syria. With its current actions, ISIL completely denies that integrity. Crucially, destroying ISIL helps the moderate forces, and those moderate forces will be crucial to Syria's future. Secondly, does our view that Assad must go help in the fight against ISIL, or—as some claim—does that confuse the picture? The expert advice that I have could not be clearer: we will not beat ISIL if we waiver in our view that ultimately Assad must go. We cannot win over majority Sunni opinion, which is vital for the long-term stability of Syria, if we suddenly to change our position.

In the end it comes back to one main question: should we take action? All those who say that ultimately we need a diplomatic solution and a transition to a new Government in Syria are right. Working with a new

representative Government is the way to eradicate ISIL in Syria in the long term, but can we wait for that to happen before we take military action? I say we cannot.

Let me be clear: there will not be a vote in this House unless there is a clear majority for action, because we will not hand a publicity coup to ISIL.

I am also clear that any motion we bring before this House will explicitly recognise that military action is not the whole answer. Proud as I am of our incredible servicemen and women, I will not pretend or overstate the significance of our potential contribution. I will not understate the complexity of this issue, nor the risks that are inevitably involved in any military action, but we do face a fundamental threat to our security. We cannot wait for a political transition. We have to hit these terrorists in their heartlands right now: and we must not shirk our responsibility for security, or hand it to others.

Throughout our history, the United Kingdom has stood up to defend our values and our way of life. We can, and we must, do so again. I commend this statement to the House.

10.50 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for providing an advance copy of his statement, which I received earlier today.

After the despicable and horrific attacks in Paris a fortnight ago, the whole House will I am sure agree that our first priority has to be the security of people in this country. So when we consider the Prime Minister's case for military action, the issue of whether what he proposes strengthens or undermines our security must be front and centre stage of our minds. There is no doubt that the so-called Islamic State group has imposed a reign of terror on millions in Iraq, in Syria and now in Libya. All that ISIL stands for and does is contrary to everything those of us on these Benches have struggled for over many generations. There is no doubt that it poses a threat to our own people. The question must now be whether extending the UK bombing from Iraq to Syria is likely to reduce or increase that threat, and whether it will counter or spread the terror campaign ISIL is waging in the middle east. With that in mind, I would like to put seven questions to the Prime Minister.

First, does the Prime Minister believe that extending air strikes to Syria, which is already being bombed by the United States, France, Russia and other powers, will make a significant military impact on the ground, which has so far seen ISIL gain, as well as lose, territory? Does he expect it will be a war-winning strategy, or does he think other members of the original coalition, including the Gulf states, Canada and Australia, have halted their participation?

Secondly, is the Prime Minister's view that the air campaign against ISIL-held areas can be successful without ground forces? If not, does he believe that the Kurdish forces or the relatively marginal and remote Free Syrian Army would be in a position to take back ISIL-held territory if the air campaign were successful? Is it not more likely that other stronger, jihadist and radical Salafist forces would take over?

Thirdly, without credible or acceptable ground forces, is not the logic of an intensified air campaign mission creep and western boots on the ground? Can the Prime Minister today rule out the deployment of British ground forces to Syria?

Fourthly, does the Prime Minister believe that United Nations security resolution 2249 gives clear and unambiguous authorisation for UK air strikes? What co-ordinated action with other United Nations member states has there been under the terms of the resolution to cut off funding, oil revenues and armed supplies from ISIL into the territory it currently holds? In the absence of any co-ordinated UN military or diplomatic strategy, does he believe that more military forces over Syria could increase the risks of dangerous incidents, such as the shooting down of a Russian military aircraft by Turkish forces this week?

Fifthly, how does the Prime Minister think an extension of UK bombing would contribute to a comprehensive negotiated political settlement of the Syrian civil war, which is widely believed to be the only way to ensure the defeat of ISIL in the country? The Vienna conference last weekend was a good step forward, but it has some way to go.

Sixthly, what assessment has the Prime Minister been given about the likely impact of British air strikes in Syria on the threat of terrorist attacks in Britain? What impact does he believe an intensified air campaign will have on civilian casualties—civilian casualties—in the ISIS-held territory and the wider Syrian refugee crisis, which is so enormous and so appalling?

Finally, in the light of the record of western military intervention in recent years, including in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, does the Prime Minister accept that UK bombing of Syria could risk more of what President Obama called “unintended consequences”, and that a lasting defeat of ISIL can be secured only by Syrians and their forces within the region?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions. I very much respect his long-held views about these issues and his quite correct caution before committing to any of these actions, but I do believe that there is a good answer to the seven absolutely legitimate questions he asks.

First, on whether extending airstrikes would have a significant military impact, I tried to give a flavour in my statement of the specific things we think we would be able to do. In many ways, it is worth listening to our closest allies, the Americans and the French, who want us to take part—not just for the cover it provides, but because of the capabilities we bring. It is worth listening very closely to what they say, so my answer is, yes, we would make a military difference.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the issue of ground forces, which I tried to tackle as fully as I could in my statement. I would guide the House that there are obviously many who want to play down the existence and the role of the Free Syrian Army. Our information and intelligence is that at least 70,000 moderate Sunni forces are able to help. We can see the help they have given, and I provided some examples in my statement.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about boots on the ground. Let me give an assurance that we are not deploying British combat forces, and we are not going to deploy British combat forces. We think that the presence of western boots on the ground would be counter-productive. That is one thing that I think we

have all, collectively across the House, learned from previous conflicts. We do not want to make that mistake again.

The fourth question was whether the UN resolution is unambiguous. I believe it is. I think the language in the resolution is very clear, which is why I quoted it in some detail. The right hon. Gentleman rightly asked what else the UN was doing on sanctions, embargoes and squeezing the finances of ISIL. There was a resolution back in February, and we should continue to support all those measures.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about dangerous incidents and the potential for them. As I explained in the statement, there is a deconfliction between what Russia is doing and what the coalition is doing. Obviously, as I said yesterday, we have to get to the bottom of what happened in Turkey, but we have permission to overfly Turkish airspace, and Turkey is our ally in this conflict.

The crucial question, the right hon. Gentleman’s fifth question, was whether what we are planning will help with transition. I think the answer is a very strong yes. The existence of ISIL, or Daesh as many call it, with its so-called caliphate, is to deny the territorial integrity of both Iraq and Syria, so we cannot have a future Syria with the existence of this caliphate taking over such a large amount of its territory. When we look to the future of Syria, we know that it is going to need the involvement of moderate Sunnis, so the more we can help them, the better the chance of transition.

The right hon. Gentleman asked another very important question about the impact of action on the threat level to this country. That is why I quoted—I had their permission to do so, having cleared my statement with them—the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee and the head of MI5. Their view is that we are already at the very highest level we could be when it comes to threats from ISIL. Again, this is about learning the lessons of Iraq. We now have this architecture of a Joint Intelligence Committee chaired by a very senior official who has that independent view. I cleared every word of my statement, as I say, with them.

On the important question of civilian casualties, I believe that the truth of the matter is that British capabilities provide one of the best ways to reduce civilian casualties. In a year and three months of the action we have taken in Iraq, there have been no reports of civilian casualties. We believe that we have some of the most accurate weapons known to man. I think extending our activities into Syria is likely to reduce civilian casualties rather than increase them.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asked about unintended consequences and the recent history we have faced. We can have a bigger debate, I am sure, about the action we have had to take around the world. We have to recognise, in my view, that this poisonous narrative of Islamist extremism is a battle for our generation. We see it in Nigeria, we see it in Somalia, and, frankly, we sometimes see it in our own country. Combating it with everything we have is not just combating it by military means; it is combating it with argument, and it is combating it by taking away grievances. It is all those things together.

I believe that we have thought through the consequences of this action. When people quote President Obama, as the right hon. Gentleman did, it is worth remembering that this American President, who saw that part of his

[*The Prime Minister*]

role was withdrawing America from some of these foreign entanglements and trying to take a different approach to these actions, is not only firmly behind American action in Syria, but is asking America's oldest friend, partner and ally to help out in this vital work.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for responding so comprehensively to the Foreign Affairs Committee report. Let me also thank the Chancellor, since he is present, for responding positively to our first report on the Foreign Office budget yesterday.

Some of my colleagues on the Committee returned early from the region around ISIL to hear the statement, while others are completing visits to 10 capitals in the region over the week. Acquiring a regional perspective is part of our inquiry into the coalition against ISIL, as was our initial report, which addressed the narrow issue of British air strikes over Syria. Behind that narrow issue sit the bigger questions of Britain's full involvement in the coalition, and whether that coalition has a strategy to achieve the aim of defeating ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the senior leaders whom we met in the region that getting the politics right in both Iraq and Syria is the immediate and overriding priority, and that we must not lose focus on Baghdad?

The Committee will discuss its collective view early next week, and we will also want to report to the House on the prospects of success for the coalition strategy in the new year. Will my right hon. Friend come before the Committee in about two months' time to give evidence to us on the implementation of the strategy he has set out today?

In the light of Vienna and my right hon. Friend's response to the Committee, it is now my personal view that, on balance, the country would be best served by the House supporting his judgment that the United Kingdom should play a full role in the coalition in order best to support and shape the politics, thus enabling the earliest military and eventual ideological defeat of ISIL to take place.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for coming back from the region to be with us in the House today, and I thank him for the report, but above all I thank him for what he has said about the decision he has reached in relation to the difficult decision we all have to make. I think he is absolutely right that any action we take must be nested in an overall strategy, which I have tried to set out today. He is also absolutely right that the politics of the region are crucial to our understanding. Most important of all, he is right about trying to ensure that Iraq makes progress towards being a more pluralistic and solid country that does not face the risk of ISIL. As I have said, in my view the politics and the action go together.

My hon. Friend asked whether I would come back to his Committee, and indeed to the House, within two months. I am very happy to come back in any way that people want me to, whether—if we decide to go ahead with this action—to give regular updates to the House, or indeed to appear in front of his Committee to go through detailed questions. I am in this, as in all things, the House's servant.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for giving me advance sight of his statement, and for the briefing we received from his national security adviser and colleagues last night. Given the seriousness of the issues with which we are all grappling, that briefing was valuable, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and I expressed our thanks to those who are working so hard to keep us all safe.

We in the Scottish National party share the concerns of everyone in the House and the country about the terrorist threat from Daesh. We deplore the Assad regime, and have repeatedly raised the issue of refugees both in the region and in Europe. The SNP strongly supports the international initiative that was agreed in Vienna to secure a ceasefire in Syria and a transition to stable representative government, and to counter terrorist groups including Daesh. We believe that these aims will be secured only through agreement and a serious, long-term commitment to Syria. How is the UK supporting the international Syria support initiative and other diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire, to ensure a political transition, to combat terrorists such as Daesh and to plan for long-term reconstruction, stability and support?

Yesterday in Prime Minister's questions, I asked two questions about Syria that the Prime Minister did not answer, so I would like to repeat them today. How will the UK plan to secure peace in Syria? As the FAC asked, "which ground forces will"—not can, but will—"take, hold, and administer territories captured from ISIL in Syria"?

He has talked about 70,000 Free Syrian Army troops. How many of those are in the north-east of Syria, on the front line against Daesh, as opposed to countering Syrian regime forces? How will the UK plan to secure long-term stability and reconstruction in Syria? The UK spent 13 times more bombing Libya than on its post-conflict stability and reconstruction. As I asked yesterday, how much does he estimate the total cost of reconstruction will be, and does he think that the amount in his statement today will be sufficient?

Two years ago, the Prime Minister urged us to bomb Daesh's opponents in Syria, which would probably have strengthened this terrorist organisation. Today, he wants us to launch a bombing campaign without effective ground support or a fully costed reconstruction and stability plan. He has asked us to consider his plan, and we have listened closely, but key questions posed by the FAC remain unanswered, and unless he answers them satisfactorily, the SNP will not vote for airstrikes in Syria.

**The Prime Minister:** First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to my national security adviser, Mark Lyall Grant, who has been working hard to provide factual briefings, on a Privy Council basis, to parties across the House of Commons. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we require political agreement and Syria's long-term reconstruction. My argument is not that I disagree, but that we also need to act now to help protect ourselves against the terrorism we have seen on the streets of Paris and elsewhere. He asked a technical question about how we are supporting the negotiation initiative in Vienna. Obviously, we are playing a full part, through the Foreign Secretary, but we are also helping to fund the work of the UN envoys trying to bring the parties together.

The right hon. Gentleman asked who were the troops on the ground. As I have explained, there are the Free Syrian Army and the Kurdish forces. That, of course, makes it a more complicated picture than Iraq, where there are the Iraq security forces, but we can help these forces to take and hold ground and to relieve suffering, as we have seen around Kobani and with the Yazidis. Important progress can be made. I was frank in my statement, however: of course, the true arrival of ground forces awaits a new Government in Syria. Having that partner is the best way to eradicate ISIL in the long-term, but again the question arises: can we wait for that to happen before we take some action that will degrade ISIL and its capabilities to do us harm?

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about Syria's long-term reconstruction. As we debated yesterday on the autumn statement, we have one of the largest development budgets in the world, and I have already said we would be prepared to commit £1 billion to such reconstruction. I think the world would come together if there was a new Government in Syria, and the Syrian people, many of whom are currently outside their country and desperate to go home, would not be left wanting for support. They would get Britain's support and, I believe, that of the whole developed world.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): The Prime Minister has made a compelling case for playing a proper part with our allies on both sides of the meaningless international border and for the political process, in which we can have a voice, of bringing the Americans closer to the Russians, and the Saudis and Turks closer to the Iranians. Does he accept, however, that in the medium term we have to look for whatever agreement can produce stability and a more peaceful situation, and that we might have to prepare ourselves for something that falls far short of a liberal, western democracy? Is not the experience of the Arab spring that going straight to democratic elections does not produce a resolution, that any agreement will have to involve some rather unpleasant people, not just those who would naturally be our allies, and that Assad and others might have to be involved, because the big enemy is ISIL, which is dangerous and cannot be engaged in any political negotiations?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend speaks with great wisdom about these matters, and it is important to have his support. He has never been an unquestioning supporter of military action, and he thinks these things through very carefully. He talks about the future government of Syria— and the transition that needs to take place falling short of some of the democratic norms that we would want to see, and yes of course that is likely. When I say that I believe Assad cannot be part of the long-term government of Syria, in many ways that is not a political preference; in my view, it is a statement of fact. There will not be a Government of Syria that can command the support of the Syrian people if he is in charge of it, because of the blood that has been shed and because of what has happened in that country. But do I believe that a transition in Syria will produce some perfect Swiss-style democracy? No of course it won't, but it might give us a partner with which we can complete the obliteration of ISIL and therefore make us safer.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): May I remind the Prime Minister that, two years ago, he was equally eloquent in telling us how essential it was to bomb the Assad regime? I believe that the decision taken by the House in 2013 was the correct one and that, had we followed his advice, the situation in Syria would now be even worse than it is. Does he agree that the crux of the issue for every Member of the House is this: would military action help to defeat ISIS? I happen to believe that the answer is no. I wonder how many Members really believe that it would make any difference at all in defeating this hated death cult.

**The Prime Minister:** I do not particularly want to re-enter all the arguments about chemical weapons use. All I will say is that I of course listen to the hon. Gentleman's views, but I also think of the thousands of people, including children, who have been killed by Assad's barrel bombs and chemical weapons since we held that vote. The hon. Gentleman asked the right question, however. Will this make us safer or not? Will it help to degrade ISIL or not? It is the view of our closest allies, our military, our intelligence experts and those responsible for our domestic security: all those people are saying that we should take this action, as part of a coalition, to help make us safer. That is why I am bringing forward this statement and, with the support of the House, I will bring forward a vote.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Following the limited but important progress on the political track in Vienna and the unanimous adoption by the United Nations of resolution 2249 on ISIL, is it not clear that the Prime Minister's considered response today is absolutely compelling? Is this not the way in which we discharge our responsibility to protect innocent civilians, both here in the United Kingdom and in Syria?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's support. This is about discharging our responsibilities, chiefly to our own citizens. It is my considered view that this action will help, over time, to make us safer. We will never be safe while ISIL exists and while this so-called caliphate exists. We have demonstrated in Iraq that we can take its territory and destroy much of its infrastructure. We can make real progress, but we are hampered by not being able to do the same in Syria. If we agree that the eradication of ISIL is essential for our national security, we should not put off the decision.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I am sure that the Prime Minister is correct to say that the continued existence of the so-called caliphate is an inspiration to violence and to extremists not only in the middle east but even in our own country. I know that these things are still subject to negotiation, but can he give the House an indication of what the characteristics of a legitimate transitional Government might be?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the so-called "caliphate". As I tried to set out in my statement, there are the military objectives of trying to break up the terrorist training camps and infrastructure, and the terrorists themselves, but there is a bigger picture, which is that while this so-called "caliphate" exists, I do not believe we are safe. We should therefore be part of its dismantling.

[*The Prime Minister*]

On the right hon. Gentleman's question about the characteristics of transition, this is what is being discussed in Vienna, but it should start with ceasefires. It should then proceed to the political work of drawing up what a transitional Government and institutions would look like, and then be followed, probably, by elections and, at some stage, a transition away from the current leadership. As I said in reply to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), this will not be a perfect or scientific process, but to me it is essential, because in the end it is political transition that will help us to complete the final destruction of ISIL—military force cannot do it on its own. I am not coming to this Dispatch Box saying that there is a purely military solution—there is not; there is a political, diplomatic and military solution, and we need to do all of the bits of that.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Many hon. and right hon. Members, including me, entirely agree with the Prime Minister that ISIL/Daesh must be crushed militarily in Syria—the crushing will indeed have to be military—but, as he acknowledged at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, air strikes alone will not be effective; they have got to be in co-ordination with credible ground forces. I have to say that the suggestion that there are 70,000 non-Islamist, moderate, credible ground forces is a revelation to me and, I suspect, to most other Members in this House. Adequate ground forces, in my view, depend on the participation of the Syrian army, so if the dictator Assad refuses to resign, which is the greater danger to our national interest: Syria under him or the continued existence and expansion of ISIL/Daesh? We may have to choose between one and the other.

**The Prime Minister:** I have great respect for my right hon. Friend, who thinks about these things very carefully. There are a lot of grounds of agreement between us: we agree on the dangers of ISIL; we agree that it needs to be crushed; we agree that that will need the involvement of ground forces; and we also agree that, as I put in my response to the Foreign Affairs Committee, we need an ISIL-first strategy—ISIL is the greater threat to the United Kingdom. I think the only areas of disagreement between us are on a technical point and a slightly more profound but not unbridgeable one. The technical point is that what I have said about 70,000 moderate forces in Syria is not my figure; it is the considered opinion of the Joint Intelligence Committee, a Committee that was set up and given independence to avoid any of the mistakes we had in the past of the potential misuse of intelligence and other information. This is its considered view; that document has been entirely cleared by the Committee, as has my statement.

The other issue we have to come to is that of course my right hon. Friend and I agree that in time the best ground troops should be the Syrian army, but my view is that that will be more likely to happen after a political transition has taken place in Syria. My contention is that the problem of believing it can be done with Assad is that we will never get the ceasefire and we will never get the participation of the Sunni majority in Syria while Assad is still there. I think the area of disagreement between us is narrowing, as is the area of disagreement

between Britain, America and France, and the Russians; we all now see the need for there to be both a military and a political solution.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister has made a strong moral and legal case for defeating what is a new totalitarianism in both Syria and Iraq, but the real question is, obviously, the practical one, and that is what the House will want to consider. May I therefore press him on the following issue? Given the different Russian objectives in Syria, how will he avoid giving support or appearing to give support to Assad forces and becoming dependent on them, and how will he avoid that giving succour to ISIL in its recruitment in the region?

**The Prime Minister:** That is the important issue. We have been very clear that our target is ISIL, not the regime. However, we will be helped, as I said in my statement, in our combating of ISIL if the Sunni majority in Syria continues to believe, rightly, that we think that Syria requires a transition away from Assad. Assad cannot, in the long term, run that country.

On Russian objectives, the gap between us has narrowed. Russia sees the danger of ISIL and is attacking them. We see the danger of ISIL and are attacking them. The difference is that Russia is still attacking the moderate Syrian forces that we believe, in time, could be part of a genuine transition in Syria that would have the support of all the Syrian people. We do have ways of deconflicting, and we are having discussions. I met President Putin at the G20. I think that the horrific attack on the Russian airliner flying from Sharm el-Sheikh will bring home to everyone in Russia again that this needs an ISIL-first strategy. That is where the greatest threat comes from and that is where we should focus.

**Dr Liam Fox** (North Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on setting out such a comprehensive approach and on stressing that it is an ISIL-first strategy. Does he accept that for the United Kingdom not to act is in itself a policy position that will have consequences, because the jihadists hate us not for what we do, but for who we are and what we stand for? Does he agree that we do not have the luxury of not confronting ISIL, because they have chosen to confront us? The question is whether we confront them over there or, increasingly, take the risk of having to confront them over here.

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend brings great clarity to this matter. Not taking action is itself a choice, and that choice has consequences. It is my judgment, and the judgment of those independent, impartial, highly trained advisers on security and military issues who take the same view, that inaction is the greater risk.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and for early sight of it. There are understandable knee-jerk reactions on both sides to the horror of Paris and of Beirut. There will be those who say, "Intervene"; those who say, "Intervene at all costs"; and also those who say, "Do not intervene no matter what the evidence points to." The Prime Minister knows that the Liberal Democrats have set out five criteria against which we can judge this statement. On that basis, may I press him on two

particular points? The Prime Minister recognises that air strikes alone will not defeat ISIL. He has already heard that he will need to give much more evidence to this House to convince it that the ground operations that are there are sufficient and have the capability and the credibility to deliver on the ground, which is what he knows needs to be delivered. What role will Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the other Gulf states play in delivering this victory, if that is the direction in which we choose to go as a country and as a House? There is also a reference to humanitarian aid in this statement. He will know that no amount of aid can help an innocent family dodge a bomb. There is no reference in this statement to establishing no-bomb zones or safe havens to protect innocent civilians if this action takes place. Will he answer that question?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response and for the fact that his party wants to engage with the arguments, think very carefully and consider the key national security arguments before making its judgment. I know that the national security adviser was pleased to brief its members last night and stands ready to brief them and answer any detailed questions that they might have. I am determined that there should be no knee-jerk reaction. I take very seriously what happened in Paris. I know absolutely that that could just as well happen in the UK, as it could happen in Belgium or elsewhere in Europe, and that the threat that we face is very, very severe. I want us to consider this and to think it through. I do not want anyone to feel that a good process has not been followed, so that if people agree with the case being put, they can in all conscience vote to support it.

The hon. Gentleman asked two specific questions. On humanitarian aid, we will continue to deliver that. On no-bomb zones, the dangers and difficulties with no-bomb zones and safe zones are that they have to be enforced, and that can require the taking out of air defences, which would spread the conflict wider and which, in many cases, requires the presence of ground troops. We will not be putting in ground troops for those purposes. I do not want to declare a safe zone unless it is genuinely safe. Of course what we want is a growing part of Iraq and a growing part of Syria to be no-bomb zones because there will no bombing taking place as we will have a political agreement that will deliver the ceasefires that we need, and we will have taken action to reduce ISIL.

On the question of ground troops and the role of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, they on the whole have been helping to fund the moderate Syrian opposition which, in my view, needs to play a part in the future of that country, and they strongly support the action that Britain proposes to take.

**Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that boots on the ground are ultimately essential if bombing is to be relevant. I would like him to convince me that what he refers to as the Free Syrian Army actually exists and is not a label that we apply to a rag-bag group of clans and tribal forces with no coherent force. I would like him to convince me that there is a moderate group that we can back, whereas in times of constitutional dissolution it is almost a law of human nature that people rally to the most extreme and forceful advocate of their group;

there are no moderates. I would like my right hon. Friend to believe that these forces, if they exist, can this time can be persuaded to act against the Islamists, whereas last time he wanted and expected them to act against Assad.

**The Prime Minister:** I very much respect my right hon. Friend's point of view because he is absolutely asking the right question about what troops there are on the ground to help us, and the truth is that there are moderate forces—the forces of the Free Syrian Army. They have a particular role in the south of the country abutting the Jordan border. They have taken the fight to ISIL, and they have, as I said in my statement, prevented ISIL from taking vital ground. When we work either with them or with Kurdish forces, we can see the effect of them taking ground, holding ground and, indeed, administering territory, as I set out in my reply to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Let me add that there is one way to ensure that the only choice for Syrians who do not back Assad is to join ISIL, and that is if we do not support the moderate forces. Most people in Syria are neither massive fans of Assad or psychopathic Islamist extremist killers. Most people in Syria want to have a pluralistic country where they can get on with their lives. That is who the Free Syrian Army and other moderate groups are fighting for, and that is why they deserve our support.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): The Prime Minister makes a strong case to the House today but he will be aware that Members on both sides want reassuring that he and his Government will indeed show the persistence and patience required over many months to get agreement on both the political strategy and reconstruction in Syria and Iraq. What reassurance can he give that his Government will provide that commitment today?

**The Prime Minister:** The commitment that I can give to the hon. Lady is that this is the No. 1 issue that we face, not only for national security but in terms of the migration crisis in Europe, which is a massive question for all European countries, Britain included. It deserves the maximum amount of attention and resources that we can give it. We will have to be patient and persistent, and not just on the political, diplomatic and humanitarian angles, where I think we have a good track record. We did not suddenly respond to the Syrian refugee crisis; we have been giving that £1 billion over the last four years. I say to the House that we will require persistence in terms of the military action that we take, just as we have in Iraq, where persistent action has led to a 30% reduction in ISIL-held territory. Those gains will not be won quickly. The strategy that we are pursuing is one that takes time because we are working with the Government on the ground in Iraq and with the legitimate forces on the ground in Syria, so we cannot expect immediate results, but over time it will make us safer.

**Nadine Dorries** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): If the attack, God forbid, had happened in London and not in Paris, I believe that today the British people would be outraged, dismayed and upset that our allies did not have our back and that their politicians were procrastinating for so long about whether to come to their aid. Prime Minister, we know that you need a vote in this House to give you support. Given your statement today and your

[*Nadine Dorries*]

declaration about what the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee and the head of MI5 have stated in their opinion, will you ask our Chief Whip to gain an assurance from the Opposition Chief Whip that the good men and women on the Opposition Benches will come to the aid of our allies sooner rather than later?

**The Prime Minister:** In putting the question of what we would be feeling if there were an attack on London rather than Paris, my hon. Friend makes a good point. Let us be frank: this attack could just as well have been in London as in Paris. We should recognise what a close alliance we have with France and with the United States and how together we can make our world safer.

As for the vote, which I hope will be held, I said that we cannot hold it if there is a danger of losing it. That is not because of Government pride or anything like that—all politicians are ultimately expendable. It is about the importance of our national security and the message it would send to our enemies. I am trying to make sure that we draw together the biggest possible coalition of Members of Parliament from all parts of the House to support what I promise will be a motion that stresses the importance of a strategy and every element of that strategy, and of post-conflict reconstruction. I think there are many points in the motion passed at the Labour party conference on this issue that either have been addressed, such as the need for a UN resolution, or can be addressed through the action that we are taking. Of course everyone has to come to their own decision, but I do not want to give anyone a way out of making that decision through some mistake over process; that would not be right.

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** I thank the Prime Minister for his statement, for the national security briefings we have received and for the discussions we have had in recent days. At times like this, it is right again to thank our brave and precious servicemen and women, who stand ready to do their duty. We on these Benches know from long experience the consequences of appeasing and indulging terrorism for too long. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, unlike last time, the action foreshadowed today is against ISIL terrorists and nobody else? I confirm that, for us, the important issues are an effective overall strategy, the targeting of terrorists, and that there is an end point. We stand ready to do what is in the best interests of our national security. If it protects our people, here and abroad, we must act. I commend the Prime Minister for his statement.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who speaks for the whole country in thanking our armed forces for the work they are already doing to combat ISIL. I can give him the absolute assurance that what we are talking about here is action against ISIL, not action against anybody else. I completely agree with him on being clear about strategy, clear about targeting and, as I was today, clear about the end point of what we are trying to achieve. They are all very much part of our approach.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** Having just returned from the middle east, I know that regional powers and allies believe that, in the absence of a

realistic long-term strategy and proper local knowledge, we risk repeating the errors we made in our interventions in Iraq, in Afghanistan post-2006 and in Libya. Key questions remain unanswered, including how best to combat the sectarianism, the extremism, and the ideology that all extremist groups, not just Daesh, feed off; and how best to disrupt the business flows—we have been talking about this in relation to Daesh for over a year now, with no effect. Also, I ask him to look again at his figure of 70,000 for Free Syrian Army forces, because we have been told very directly in recent contact that there are very few moderates remaining on either side of this civil war. Without answers to these questions, airstrikes will only reinforce the west's failure in the region generally, at a time when already there are too many aircraft chasing too few targets.

**The Prime Minister:** I believe that what there are too many of is terrorists threatening our country, but I agree with my hon. Friend that we have to combat the ideology, and that is a very big part of our strategy. It is a very big part of our domestic strategy—the Prevent duty: what we are saying all our schools and universities must do, and what our communities must do together. I think that more action on that has been taken by this country than by many others in Europe and around the world.

On starving ISIL of money and resources, I could not agree more. If there are more UN resolutions, more action, more that can be done, I will be first to push for that, but let us be frank about where ISIL get their money from: they got their money out of the banks in Mosul; they get their money from selling oil to Assad; they get their money from owning and occupying such a large amount of territory.

The 70,000 figure is not mine. I have not produced any of these figures; they come directly from the security and intelligence experts who advise me, now filtered through a proper Joint Intelligence Committee process set up under the Butler inquiry after the Iraq war. I am determined that we learn the lessons of that conflict, but surely the lesson cannot be that when we are threatened and we can make a difference, we should somehow stand back.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** The Prime Minister was commended, rightly, for not lashing out militarily after the provocation of the atrocities of Tunisia, but he is wrong now to ignore the real threat—the ISIL plan—which is to escalate a regional war into a world war between Christians and Muslims. Would not our action now repeat what we did in 2003, when we deepened the divide between Muslims and Christians, which is ISIL's strategy? The great threat is home-grown terrorism, and is it not likely that the Prime Minister's action will increase recruits to jihadism, here and elsewhere in the world?

**The Prime Minister:** I know the hon. Gentleman deeply wants to have the peaceful world that we all dream of. In that we have something in common, but ISIL have taken action against us already. They were behind the murder of the people on the beach in Tunisia. They are behind the plots in our country. They butchered our friends and allies and our citizens in Paris. As for the battle between Muslims and Christians, that is what

we want to avoid. It is by working with Muslim allies to stop this radicalisation, stop this extremism and stop ISIL that we prevent that clash from taking place. ISIL butcher Muslims in vast numbers, and that is why they have to be stopped. We cannot subcontract that work out to everybody else; we should be part of it.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): For those of us who were in this House and saw another Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box and felt that we voted at that time to take military action on a false premise, may I thank the Prime Minister for coming to the House and for his approach and openness over what I believe is a real and present threat to citizens in the UK? There can be no doubt that we would bring a specific military capability through our precision guided missiles, Paveway IV and Brimstone. If and when—I believe when—we join in the military action in Syria, is the Prime Minister satisfied that we have sufficient stocks and manufacturing capability to sustain and fulfil our military objectives there?

**The Prime Minister:** I can confirm that we have sufficient stocks, but let me respond to my right hon. Friend's wider point. It is true that what happened in 2003 over Iraq poisoned the well in many ways in the debate about these issues. I have tried to go about this in as different a way as possible—no rush, clear legal advice, the publication of as much of it as possible, the widest possible international coalition, strong Arab and Muslim partners, and trying to take the House through this every step of the way. The one thing I would say to colleagues is that we must not let 2003 and decisions about Iraq hold us back from taking correct decisions after proper consideration. That would be not just letting down our allies, but letting down ourselves and the people we are here to represent.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Is it not essential in any prelude to a war to be sure of our allies and to be sure of the objectives? Is it not a fact that Turkey has been buying oil from ISIL? They used Turkey's trucks to store it. Turkey has been bombing the Kurds, and the Kurds are fighting ISIL. Turkey shot down a Russian jet, even though Russia wants to fight ISIL. The Prime Minister has the objective of getting rid of Assad. A Russian ally has the opposite objective. What a crazy war—enemies to the right of us, enemies to the left of us. Keep out.

**The Prime Minister:** The one thing I agree with the hon. Gentleman about is that we should be clear about our allies and our objectives. Our allies include not just the United States of America and France but Gulf states and others in the region, which are all now coming together in an alliance to get rid of ISIL. We also need to be clear about our objectives, which are the military targets that I spoke about but also the deflating and destruction of this caliphate that is such a risk to our world.

As for Turkey and oil smuggling, it has taken action to try to stop the smuggling across its border by confiscating the oil, taking forward prosecutions and trying to seal its border. Should it do more? Yes, of course it should do more, and that is very much part of our strategy.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Last night, two senior French military officers told me how much their country would appreciate our joining fully in taking the fight to the accursed Daesh in Syria. Pinpoint-accurate bombing by the RAF would demonstrate our determination to destroy the scourge of Daesh. I applaud the Prime Minister for trying to get parliamentary approval for co-ordinated offensive action in Syria, and I ask that we bring that highly potent gesture to a vote of this House as soon as next week. Our allies want us to prove that we are fully with them.

**The Prime Minister:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has served in conflict zones. He knows the importance of making these decisions after careful consideration, and he absolutely knows the importance of standing by our allies.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I thank the Prime Minister for the statement and for sight of it beforehand.

I was on the same Bench in 2003 when Tony Blair presented the case for war in Iraq with his customary sincerity. Plaid Cymru MPs voted against that war. For us, it was a matter of integrity. Before the Prime Minister comes to this House again to put the case for more war to the vote, I ask him to examine his conscience and examine all choices short of bombing, as we all must. It is a case of life and death, and eventually, for all of us, it is a matter of integrity.

**The Prime Minister:** I agree that this is a matter of integrity, and there is no part of me that wants to take part in any military action that I do not believe is 100% necessary for our own safety and security. That is what this is about.

The hon. Gentleman refers back to the Iraq vote. I know that was a time of great difficulty for the House and the country and has become hugely controversial, but as I said earlier, we must not let that hold us back from making correct and thought-through decisions when we are under such threat. And we are—that bomb in Paris could have been in London. If ISIL had their way, it would be in London. I cannot stand here and say we are safe from all these threats. We are not. I cannot stand here and say, either, that we will remove the threat through the action that we take, but do I stand here with advice behind me that taking action will degrade and reduce that threat over time? Absolutely. I have examined my conscience and that is what it is telling me.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): Given Britain's historical connections with the region, may I strongly endorse my right hon. Friend's view expressed in his memorandum to the Foreign Affairs Committee this morning that

“now is the time to scale up British diplomatic, defence and humanitarian efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict and to defeat ISIL”?

May I urge him to intensify his discussions with President Putin, who clearly has the ear of President Assad and will be key to any resolution of the conflict? May I also remind him that it was thanks to the intervention of the Royal Air Force and other air forces that Iraq was prevented from falling into the hands of ISIL completely, which would have been catastrophic for the region? It makes no sense to stop at the Iraqi border today.

**The Prime Minister:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's support. The point he makes about Iraq is particularly potent because there was a danger of ISIL overrunning Iraq, and that was stopped through the combination of action from the sky, including by us, and legitimate ground forces. He is also right to talk about the importance of discussing these issues with President Putin, as I have done and will continue to do. There is a gap between us, but I believe it is reducing.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I agree with the Prime Minister that the diplomatic and political process must play a key part in our approach to the hugely complex situation in Syria, and credit should be given to the part it has played so far. But with some limited progress now being seen to come out of Vienna, will he directly address the vital concerns that come through very strongly in the evidence to the Select Committee report that our ability to continue that key political and diplomatic role will be compromised fundamentally if we join the bombing?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady asks a very important question, which is whether taking action against ISIL in Syria makes a political agreement more likely or less likely. In my view, it makes it more likely, first of all because we need to have a Syria with territorial integrity, and unless we deal with ISIL and the caliphate we will not have a Syria to have a transition in. Secondly, while she and I may disagree about many things, surely moderate Sunni forces in Syria need to play a part in the future of that country, so we should be helping them, including through what we do with ISIL, rather than seeing them being wasted away.

**Mr James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): The comprehensive yet, if I may say so, moderate, cautious and wise way in which the Prime Minister has answered many of the concerns this morning will, I think, have led opinion in the House and throughout the country to favour taking the right move, which is striking against ISIS wherever it may be. Does he not agree that the big decision we took was in the House last September, when by 548 votes to 43 we decided to attack ISIS? That decision remains today. Does he not agree that surely some of these current decisions must be taken by him, by the generals and by the intelligence chiefs, and not necessarily taking account of the twists and turns of political fortune in this House?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support. The point he makes about looking back at the decision we made with respect to ISIL in Iraq and reaching a judgment is an important one, because the judgment was the right one and ISIL has been pushed back in quite a large way since that decision. As for coming in front of this House, I have been very clear that I reserve the right to take action in Britain's national interest, when I need to, immediately, as I did over the terrorists in Syria, but we now have the convention, which I am happy to apply, that there should be a vote in the House before premeditated action.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I am rather anxious that we seem to be responding on the basis of "something must be done", which is not always the basis for the best decisions. I wonder whether the

Prime Minister has received information about the strikes in Raqqa that have definitely hit civilian areas and the fact that there is an increase in the number of refugees because they do not know which way to run. I think we do need to be conscious of the risk of recruitment. The people who bombed London in 2005 lived here and the people who bombed Paris lived there. We will not bomb them out of existence, and we know that this may well increase recruitment of extremists here.

**The Prime Minister:** I would say to the hon. Lady that this absolutely is not a "something must be done" strategy; it is about careful consideration, bringing together all the parts of a plan—diplomatic, political, humanitarian, reconstruction, and military action. Doing nothing, which is the opposite of what the hon. Lady would say, also has consequences, which we have to consider very carefully. In my view, we are at greater risk in terms of the dangerous recruitment of Islamist extremists in our own country for as long as this so-called caliphate exists.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend's approach as set out in his statement, particularly that he is working with our allies. May I urge him to talk to President Obama to ask him when the United States is going to show more resolve? Is it not strange that during the Bosnia conflict it mounted perhaps 130 sorties a day and every aircraft was cleared to drop or shoot, whereas in Syria it is perhaps doing an average of seven sorties a day and only one or two aircraft are cleared to drop or shoot? Should we not expect more from the United States if this alliance is going to be successful?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's support. He is right to say how important it is always to have a clear strategy—to have a set of goals and clear means to achieve those goals, which is what I believe I have set out today. The Americans are bearing a lot of the burden of attacking ISIL in Syria, but with other allies, including moderate Arab states. Obviously the greater the part that we play in response to their requests, the greater influence we can have on the course of the campaign, and, in answer to questions from Opposition Members, the greater accuracy we can insist on in terms of targeting.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has made a very powerful case this morning. On Tuesday, the head of counter-terrorism said in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee that the threat of Daesh in this country is very real. May I press the Prime Minister on two points? First, an inevitable consequence of our intervention will be that the migration crisis will get much worse. I know that we are ready for that, but is the rest of the European Union ready for it? Secondly, the Prime Minister says that he is the servant of the House. We are all servants of the people. Could I invite him to invite leaders of the Muslim community to meet him at Downing Street, so that he can put the case to them as eloquently as he has put it to us?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support, and for what he has said about his Select Committee and the evidence it received from counter-terrorism experts. I believe they are all speaking

with the same voice about the risks we face from this so-called caliphate. The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of migration. In the end, the only way to stop the migration crisis is a political solution in Syria, and as I have argued, this action goes together with the political solution we need. He is right to say how important it is to discuss all the issues with members of the Muslim community. I have set up a new engagement forum, and I will look very closely at the specific idea he has suggested.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): I support an ISIL-first strategy, but can my right hon. Friend explain how we will succeed with that strategy if it is not shared by Turkey, which seems to be more interested in bombing Kurds than in bombing ISIL?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's support. It is right to have, as I have set out, an ISIL-first strategy. I think what we are seeing from others involved in this process is a growing understanding that the true enemy is ISIL. If we look at what happened with the hideous bombing in Ankara, which has now been laid firmly at the door of ISIL, we will see that there is a growing understanding from Turkey's leaders that ISIL is an enormous threat to their country—which it is.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Although it has been helpful to hear the Prime Minister say more about how robust the intelligence is in support of some of the facts he has provided today, particularly with regard to the 70,000 Syrian fighters, the issue of ground forces, which has been raised by other Members, is key, and today's statement was weak in that regard. I have asked him this question twice before: what efforts is he continuing to make to persuade the Iraqi Government to do more to arm and support the Sunnis in Iraq, because they will be crucial to defeating ISIL?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Prime Minister al-Abadi is a great improvement on his predecessor in wanting a genuinely plural society in Iraq, but we need more progress on hiring Sunnis—and indeed Kurds—into the Iraqi security forces, so that there are troops who will be trusted by local people when they clear and hold territory that is occupied by Sunni tribes. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about that. We are doing everything we can. We already have forces training the Iraqi security forces, at their request, on countering improvised explosive devices; I am sure they would like us to do more. We will keep looking at their requests and see what more we can do. The hon. Gentleman is completely right about that.

On the robustness of the intelligence case regarding the Free Syrian Army, as I have said, that is all cleared through the authorities in a way that never existed properly before the Iraq war. Those changes were put in place. If the House wants, through its Select Committees, to invite some of those senior officials to give detailed evidence, I am very happy for that to happen. In no way do I want to be accused of inventing or overstating intelligence information; I am trying to understate everything. The only thing I am absolutely clear about is that we face a threat and we should deal with it.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): The Prime Minister has made a compelling and considered case today. Having voted against action last time this subject came to the House, I would like to say that I will join him in standing with not only our allies, but the countless thousands of Muslims across the region who have been enslaved, massacred and tortured. What reassurance can he give our forces who are supporting Kurds and other local forces on the ground that they will not be bombed by Russia?

**The Prime Minister:** May I thank my hon. Friend for her support? This is a different question that the House is considering, and I do not want to go back over past ground. This is a new question, and I would appeal to colleagues right across the House to respond in the way that she has done.

In terms of the moderate forces, this is the remaining disagreement between us and Russia. So far, Russia has done more to inflict damage on the moderate forces than on ISIL. There are some signs of that changing, and we need to encourage that to change more, not least because in the processes we have had in the past, including the Geneva processes, the Russians have accepted that people such as the Free Syrian Army and their civilian representatives should play a part in the future of Syria.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I thank the Prime Minister for coming to the House to deal with some of the issues raised in our report about how we can best and most effectively bring an end to Daesh. The House has been asked to commit to military action in the past in areas such as Libya and Iraq, as the Prime Minister said, and that has ended badly. I do not believe that he has yet answered our questions adequately on issues such as ground troops or a long-term strategy. Further to the comments by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, will the Prime Minister give a commitment to appear before the Committee to give evidence before a motion comes before the House to approve military action?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to appear in front of the Select Committee. I cannot promise to do that before a vote in this House, but obviously, were there to be a vote in this House, I would appear in this House—at this Dispatch Box—for a full day's debate. I will sit and listen to contributions, I will take questions, and I will take as many interventions as I possibly can.

I would say to the hon. Gentleman that I think the Select Committee asked good questions, and I would urge him to read our response in full; it is incredibly detailed. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has, I think, indicated that the answers are satisfactory. I ask the hon. Gentleman, as a member of that respected Select Committee, to look at it carefully. If there are other points that he wants to raise and write to me about, I am very happy to enter into a correspondence with him.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): The Prime Minister will know that some of the regional tensions in the middle east and Syria stem from the mutual hostility and antagonism between Iran and Saudi Arabia. During our Foreign Affairs Committee visit to

[Daniel Kawczynski]

both Tehran and Riyadh this week, we were given assurances that both countries are prepared to start constructive dialogue. Will he use his good offices at the United Nations to bring these two countries together to try to make sure that their hostility stops?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran is going to be crucial to providing the backdrop to a political solution in Syria. We need to make sure that the potential conflict between Sunni majority nations and Shi'a majority nations does not overtake what is necessary, which is to identify the common enemy: this Islamist extremist violence, most notably through ISIL, which is of course a threat to us, as we have discussed, but also a massive threat to the stability and security of the region.

**Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): It is of course important that the Prime Minister provides the reassurances that many of my Labour colleagues are seeking—particularly on the reconstruction fund, which he mentioned, for after the conflict—but is not United Nations Security Council resolution 2249 a pivotal moment? Will he confirm that it not only permits all necessary steps to be taken to eradicate ISIL, but actually calls on member states to take all necessary steps? What would it say about our judgment if we failed to take heed of the appeal from the United Nations?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful point. The Security Council resolution confirms the right of member states to defend themselves and others, and it confirms the need to do so against ISIL, so I think that is a very powerful point. When people talk about knee-jerk reactions, we need to think about what has changed. What has changed is that we have a UN Security Council resolution, Paris has happened, the political process has happened, and the advice about the need for action is so clear. Labour Members will, I know, be thinking very carefully about this, and rightly so, but I was looking at what their party conference motion said about opposing action until the “following conditions are met”, of which the first point was:

“Clear and unambiguous authorisation...from the United Nations.”

That is a very important step forward, so Members who feel that this is the right action should see that as a very important point.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for the great care that he has taken to inform us. Indeed, he has made a very convincing case today. However, he and I sat in this Chamber when a very convincing case was made for the Iraq war, so we need to be very careful about this. He may not want to say a lot in public about this point at the moment, but many of us want to be convinced about the operational basis of this action, and to be sure that it will make a difference in this benighted country.

I say gently to the Prime Minister that the weakest part of his argument was in his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis). This rag-bag army of the Free Syrians will not take the

territory held by ISIL. I know that the Prime Minister will not want to say this in public now and eat his words, but we have to co-operate with Russia, Assad and the Syrian army if we are to complete a bombing war and look forward to the reconstruction after that.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says about the case that has been made. Let us not look back to Iraq and 2003. We have to separate in our minds, our actions and our votes the case in front of us now from what people feel they were told back in 2003.

My hon. Friend says that one of the most difficult arguments is the one about ground troops. He is absolutely right; it is probably the most difficult argument. I am not denying that. I am not pretending that there is some perfect armed force, formed up and ready for us to work with. I am saying: do not underestimate the fact that there are Free Syrian Army forces and Kurdish forces that can help. I am not overplaying them or overly bigging them up; they do exist, they are doing good work and we can help them. However, I have said very specifically that the real arrival of the ground troops we need will follow a political transition to a new Government in Syria.

The only difference between me and my hon. Friend—and, indeed, between me and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)—is on whether we could team up with Assad. I do not think that that is practical, doable or the right course, not least because Assad has been something of a recruiting sergeant for ISIL. I hope that that difference between us does not mean that we end up in different Lobbies. He understands, and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East understands, that there is a threat from ISIL. Inasmuch as we can act now to reduce that threat, we should.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the considered way in which he has approached this statement. If I have understood him correctly, he thinks that the UK's participation in the existing military action in Syria would fulfil two functions. First, it would disrupt ISIL's communications to guard against terrorist threats here. Secondly, it would buy time for forces on the ground in Syria to push ISIL/Daesh back, pending a political settlement in that country. On the second point, if ISIL/Daesh was pushed back, what is his best judgment of what forces would be most likely to move in and fill the gap, in advance of the political settlement that he and I want to see?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the two points that I am making. Let me answer him in a slightly strange way. When Russia bombed the Free Syrian Army, the forces that went into the area tended to be ISIL forces. The point I am making is that if we take action against ISIL where there are moderate forces or Kurdish forces, they have shown that, if we act in conjunction with them, they can take hold of and administer territory. That is what we should do. We should not overstate their abilities. As I have said, we will have to wait for a transition in Syria to have the full answer. However, the question is, “Can we make progress now?”, and my answer is yes.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his comprehensive statement this morning, but I caution him about ruling out the use of western ground troops. God forbid that this should happen, but further major attacks on the west like those we have seen in Paris, London and New York could—I say “could”—force or demand the western allies to deploy with local troops to crush ISIL and prevent further atrocities on our streets.

**The Prime Minister:** I have great respect for my hon. Friend and his knowledge of military issues, but we have to think about the danger of being counterproductive. There is good evidence from history that the presence of western ground troops could itself be a radicaliser. That is why we are charting such a careful path, and are saying that we support action from the air and providing support to troops on the ground, but that we do not propose the application of British ground troops.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am keen to accommodate the interest of colleagues, which is understandably extensive. I would be assisted in that regard by brevity, as exemplified by a distinguished lawyer. I call Emily Thornberry.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I listened with great care to what the Prime Minister said because I wanted to hear about the strategy and the plan, but I am disappointed because I fear it is very thin. I have many questions, but I will ask just one about the military strategy. I know the Prime Minister agrees that we cannot bomb Syria into a western-style democracy from 30,000 feet, and that there must be much more. I want to focus on ground troops. The 70,000 moderate Sunni ground troops that the Prime Minister mentioned seem to be in the wrong place, and there is some question about whether they really exist. Most importantly, given that the Russians are supposed to be some form of ally to us on this matter, I imagine that we will be taking co-ordinated action with them. The Russians will surely continue to bomb those moderate Sunnis, so we will have chaos on the ground.

**The Prime Minister:** As I explained in my statement, the military strategy is to take out the terrorist targets that we can, as that will help to degrade and dismantle ISIL in Syria. It is to deflate and ultimately destroy the caliphate, which is a radicalising force around the world. We do not agree with the Russians in every regard, for the clear reasons that I have given, and we want them to focus on ISIL and not on the Free Syrian Army. We need to have that discussion with them, but as I said, I believe the gap between us is getting narrower.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us hear piercing directness and brevity from Mr Philip Davies.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I am prepared to support the Prime Minister in military action against Islamic State, which poses a severe and direct threat to us, but not against Assad, who does not. I want an ISIS-only strategy, rather than an ISIS-first strategy. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the motion he brings forward will be tightly defined and will include military action

only against Islamic State, and that it will not give him wiggle room to go ahead and attack Assad on the back of that?

**The Prime Minister:** I can rarely give my hon. Friend full satisfaction, but this time I can. I guarantee that the resolution, if we have one, will say exactly that.

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): The Prime Minister has made a strong and compelling case, particularly as regards action on the grounds of national security, and I welcome the comprehensive, albeit belated, nature of this debate. He spoke about an ISIS-first plan, rather than a Syria-first plan. There is growing evidence that Assad's barbarity is unhelpful and is forcing moderate Syrians towards extremism. I feel that to date the UK has not given this crisis the diplomatic priority that it demanded. What reassurance can the Prime Minister give the House that a tactical focus on airstrikes will not distract from or undermine vital attempts to achieve a ceasefire and a political transition?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady puts her point well, and I can give her the guarantee that we are stepping up our diplomatic and political efforts, as seen through the work of the Foreign Secretary and the work I am doing on this issue. This is a whole-Syria strategy, because in the end there will be no defeat of ISIL until there is a Syrian Government who can represent all of Syria's people. Wherever these Islamist extremist groups are in the world—whether it is al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, or ISIL in Libya and now in Syria and Iraq—they take advantage of ungoverned space, corrupt Governments, and a failure of countries to look after their people. This is a strategy for Syria, but we must recognise that there will be no Syria unless we degrade and destroy ISIL.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for his considered statement and approach to this issue. Following the atrocities in Paris, it is important that we are shown standing shoulder to shoulder with France, and I will support any motion that he brings forward to take action against ISIS in Syria. Will he be talking to his counterparts in other European Union countries to ensure that they, too, play their part in defeating ISIS?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support. I can certainly confirm that I will be having those conversations. President Hollande is coming to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting on Friday to talk about climate change. I will be able to report to him very directly the feeling in the House of Commons about the need to stand shoulder to shoulder with our French allies and colleagues. There is then an EU conference on EU relations with Turkey. I will be able to have many discussions with EU Presidents and Prime Ministers about the discussions we have had here, the mood of the House of Commons, and what needs to be done.

**Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree that, whatever important differences we have, there is a united message from across the House about our abhorrence of Islamic State and all its works? All of us wish to eliminate it from our society and from the globe. Does he also agree, however,

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that we must learn the lessons from Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and that we must not go in on a tactic and make up the strategy as we go along? Fundamentally, will he consider even more fully doing the things Islamic State does not want us to do: build an international coalition, including with Assad, Russia and Turkey; and, above all, build an Islamic coalition in the region so that the people on the ground can carry the whole of global moderate Islamic opinion with them and isolate Islamic State from its support?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need to show unity in what we say about ISIL. I think that is clear across the House. We also need to make sure that the coalition to counter ISIL includes Muslim countries and Gulf states, and it does. The only point of disagreement I would have with him is that I think we cannot include Assad in that coalition. He has been one of the radicalisers and the recruiting sergeants to ISIL, because of the barrel bombs and the attacks on his own people. Let me be clear again: this military action, were we to take it, would be targeted against ISIL, not against the regime.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with our two closest military allies, France and the USA, but does the Prime Minister agree we need to protect our way of life for our future generations and for the Syrian refugees who want to return home?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. What lies behind wanting to take this action is not just the protection of ourselves here in this country but building a Syria to which people can return. That is what they want.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): I commend the Prime Minister for the way he has brought this matter to the House. The failure to date of the allied operation to defeat Daesh is not through a lack of air power or bombs that the UK could provide; it is through a lack of sufficient and efficient ground forces able to capitalise on the temporary gains air power is able to achieve. The Free Syrian Army is not adequate to, nor even focused on, the task of defeating Daesh. It is equally focused on undermining Assad's regime. Until the Government can guarantee a strong ground presence, does he accept that his strategy is one of hope, not confidence?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he says about the way I am presenting this case. I am not presenting this case as one of perfection. Syria is very far from perfection. Even Iraq, where we have the ground troops of the Iraqi security forces and the peshmerga, is a far from ideal situation. As Opposition Members have said, we need to see more Sunnis engaged in the Iraqi armed forces. Obviously, in Syria we need more ground forces to help us do what we do. I believe, however, that to conclude from that we should do nothing is a counsel of despair. We should be taking this action, building on the resources we have.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): The Prime Minister is entirely right that ISIL poses a direct threat to the security of this country and that therefore this

country should play its part in helping to defeat it. What assessment has he made of the position of Iran, which is of course itself a fundamentalist state? It is, with Russia, one of the principal sponsors of the Assad regime and has many thousands of troops on the ground in Syria.

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Iran plays a large role in Syria. We have many differences with Iran's policies and approach. As the first British Prime Minister to meet an Iranian President for 35 years, I have always been clear about what those differences are. I think across the House we can agree on the importance of Iran taking part in this political process. It is crucial that it is around the table for the Vienna process. We need the regional players to buy into the future of Syria.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is, of course, critical we learn the lessons from the past, but it is also critical we escape the trap that sees ISIL and their affiliates as always being a reaction to what we do. They are not children. They are adults who are fully and entirely responsible for what they do.

If we take the decision the Prime Minister is going to put before the House, it will not just extend our involvement, but extend our responsibility. What more can he say to convince the House and the country of his and his Government's staying power on the diplomatic and political front, particularly at a time when big questions are being asked about Britain's role in the world and how we see our place in the world?

**The Prime Minister:** I have said before that I think the right hon. Gentleman speaks with great clarity about this issue: about ISIL, the threat it poses and its own responsibility for its actions, rather than believing it is somehow a reaction to what we do. On what Britain can bring in terms of statecraft and resources, he will have seen the decision we have taken about our Foreign and Commonwealth Office and aid budgets. I think we have the ability to bring countries together, to play a big role in what is needed diplomatically, and to have a large wallet at the end of the process not just to look after refugees, vital though that is, but to help to rebuild the country once the war is over.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) spoke correctly when he said that those in ISIS are absolutely responsible for their actions. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister make a few comments on the fact that their actions are not simply an add-on? The attacks in Paris are not an add-on to their strategy. They are a core part of their theology. They are a vile, satanic death cult and they must be stopped.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has considerable military experience and understanding of these issues. It is a core part of ISIL's strategy not simply to build a so-called caliphate across Iraq and Syria, but to plan external attacks from that caliphate, as we have seen in Ankara, Beirut and Paris and the attacks we have thwarted in London. It is a core part of what it does.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am very glad the Prime Minister believes we cannot bomb the ground unless there is a plan for holding the ground. I am glad he agrees we will not win unless there are more moderate Sunnis involved in forming an alternative Government-in-waiting. Without that Government-in-waiting, we risk the ground being ungoverned. What assurances can he give us that there are moderate Sunni leaders, particularly in Mosul and Raqqa? The truth is that the peshmerga, the Iraqi security forces and the Free Syrian Army will find it difficult to take those cities. If the political leaders are there, will he tell us who they are?

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say how important it is to have those ground forces. I pay tribute to what the peshmerga have been able to achieve with American, British and German support. It is also important to recognise what the Iraqi security forces have achieved and how we have rolled back a large extent of the so-called caliphate in Iraq. Syrian moderate forces will suffer further attrition unless we support them. There are 70,000 now. There will be more if we demonstrate our support for them financially, as we do already, and with equipment, as we do already; and, frankly, if we take the fight to ISIL, who are an enormous threat to them. This is partly within our powers. In terms of the people who lead these organisations, whether it is the Kurdish regional authority or the Free Syrian Army, they are all people we are in contact with and are working with. If the argument is being made that there are not enough of them, yes, I agree. But I do not think that that is an argument for inaction; it is an argument helping them and building them up.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): The only apparent source of wealth for ISIL comes from onshore oil fields that do not require precision bombing to take out, yet we have made very little progress on this in the past year. Will the Prime Minister say why we have not attacked this source of wealth, and whether, going forward, we will be able to?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The simple answer to his question is that a lot of these fields are in Syria. When we ask what more we can do to cut off sources of funds to ISIL, we would be enormously helped if we could take the action in Syria that I am proposing.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): While there are some who will set myriad preconditions that they know cannot be met realistically in the given timescale, there are nevertheless very legitimate questions. May I return the Prime Minister to the issue of Iraq? Will he have the courage to say that the Abadi Government are far from being a great improvement on their predecessor and that the political settlement in Iraq is broken, so that any long-term solution will come from the international community recognising that and placing a greater emphasis on rebuilding the capacity for the Sunni areas to govern for themselves?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The situation in Iraq—and its Government—is fragile and needs a lot of extra work, although it is an improvement

on what came before. Again, my argument would be that it is by engaging that we are able to bring about change. This debate is revealing that there are answers to all these questions. We raise questions about whether they are comprehensive enough, but there is no perfection when it comes to this issue. In the end, we can ask all the questions and try to answer them, and then we reach a point of decision. In my view, from everything that is emerging from this discussion, there are answers, but in the end we cannot dodge the decision.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): In relation to defeating this evil organisation, its ideological appeal and its self-proclaimed legitimacy, our key ally France uses the term Daesh, and the French media now follow. Paragraph 1(3)(5) of UN resolution 2249 mentions Daesh, as do the EU statement, the entire Arab League and 170 Members of Parliament. Doing so would help to address the rise in Islamophobia in this country, which I know the Prime Minister does not want, but which is happening by deliberately linking Islam with this terrorist organisation. It has chosen to call itself an Islamic state and a caliphate for a reason—we should not do that.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is fighting this strong campaign and convincing increasing numbers of people. My only concern is whether we might lose the public by changing the name. I am listening very carefully to the arguments he is making.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the patience he has shown this morning in his statement. I would like to press him on one point. He rightly talks about combating ISIL/Daesh, but he has also talked about Assad. Can he use the words that I think would comfort people in this House and in the country and say that Her Majesty's Government are not about "regime change" in Syria?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to say that. We are not taking or proposing to take military action to achieve regime change in Syria. That is not the agenda. The agenda is to help others, including our allies, to degrade, deflate and ultimately destroy ISIL. We believe, as everyone in the Vienna process believes, that there needs to be political transition in Syria. That is not just the British view; it is the French view, the American view, and indeed in many ways also the Russian view, as well as the view of others. Whatever one's view about Assad, there will need to be over time a comprehensive and pluralistic Government in Syria that can represent all the people.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that ISIL/Daesh needs to be taken on in its physical territory in northern Iraq and Syria. Does he agree, however, that this is not just a physical battlefield; it is a battlefield that is going on in cyberspace, too, and that we need to ensure that we take on ISIL/Daesh wherever they are—physically or virtually?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A lot of use has been made of social media and cyberspace, so the conflict needs to take place there as well.

**Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): One of the challenges we will face is the increasing number of refugees next spring. What steps will we take, with our allies, to ensure that we deal with the threat of terrorism that uses the cover of the passage of refugees into Europe to strike at European countries, including the United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. At Europe's external border, we need to do better at making sure that refugees are properly fingerprinted and documented, so that people cannot do what might have happened recently with movements across the border. In Britain, we maintain our own border controls. As I have said from this Dispatch Box before, if we have legitimate security concerns, we are able to stop people coming into this country, whether they be EU citizens or those coming from elsewhere.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I think the whole House will appreciate the way in which the Prime Minister is taking this process through Parliament. He was at the Dispatch Box on Monday and he said in reply to my question that he had an open door to the Leader of the Opposition on this issue. The Leader of the Opposition has asked seven sensible questions today, but has not actually expressed a view on what he might do. Does the Prime Minister think there is room, perhaps even before next week, to get the Leader of the Opposition in and agree a draft motion with him?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have always said, my door is open to the Leader of the Opposition. He and his team had a briefing from my national security adviser last night and asked a series of questions that I think got some comprehensive answers. If we decide to go ahead with a vote, having seen a sign of significant support across the House, I will try to draft the broadest possible motion that will attract the widest possible support. If people have suggestions about what they would like to see in that motion, I would be very happy to hear from them.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Let me bring the Prime Minister back to the direct threat to our own constituencies. He will be well aware of individuals from my constituency who were groomed and travelled to fight for Daesh and of an individual from Cardiff city who is believed to have posed a direct threat to the UK as a result of his activities with Daesh. Will he say more about the necessity of going after Daesh in the territory that it controls and how that impacts on actions here, recruitments and actions against this country's citizens?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, which is why our military objectives are not simply the elimination of terrorist networks, training camps and the rest. While this so-called caliphate exists, and while it is able to broadcast its poison and its message, it is—shockingly—attracting people from right across the world. It does not matter which President or Prime Minister I speak to—I had talks with the Prime Minister of Canada last night, for example, and I shall see many others at the Commonwealth Heads

of Government conference from all over the world. As long as this so-called caliphate exists, it attracts young people and poses risks to us all.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for his considered statement, which I very much support. May I ask for his reassurance that the fantastic work in Iraq of the men and women of the Royal Air Force over the past year and more, including most recently at Sinjar in supporting troops on the ground, will not be diluted by any action that we take?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. He asks an important question about the additional resources that would be brought into play if we were to go ahead. That is exactly what we would do. Action would principally be a combination of our Typhoon and Tornado jets, and we will want to continue what we are doing in Iraq while doing more in Syria as well.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): I have listened very carefully to what the Prime Minister has said. May I ask him about ensuring whether his strategy is truly comprehensive? I asked on Tuesday about financial flows to Daesh, and I want to ask now what consideration the Prime Minister has given to the economic future for Syria. What plans is he bringing forward, with our international partners, to make sure that the economic future of Syria is sustainable at the point we can make it so?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady asks a very important question. The truth is that ISIL/Daesh has possession of some parts of Syria that have oilfields in them, so it is able to take and sell that oil, sometimes to the Syrian Government, in order to sustain itself and make money. By acting in Syria, we may be able to cut off those flows to an even greater extent that we have done already. As for the future of Syria, the country has natural resources and the great resource of its people; it would, in a transitional form, attract huge support from across the Arab world and the developed world here in the west. We want to see Syria rebuilt, so its people can return there.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am keen to accommodate the remaining interest. However, the pithy replies we have had from the Prime Minister must now be matched by single, short, supplementary questions without preamble.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend explain how long this strategy will take to implement, given that we are clearly not going to get instantaneous results?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has asked an important question. I will report back to the House regularly, but I do not want to put a timeframe on this, because, as what we are doing in Iraq has shown, this is taking time. It is taking time partly because we are not committing ground troops. This is a strategy of relying on, and working with, those on the ground. That takes

longer, but the fact that it is a long strategy and a complex strategy does not mean that it is not the right one.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): There will be Muslims in this country, particularly young Muslims, who, although they do not support ISIL/Daesh, are concerned about the UK being seen to take military action against other Muslims. Will the Prime Minister address that concern directly, and make it clear that to be anti-ISIL/Daesh is not to be anti-Muslim?

**The Prime Minister:** That is absolutely the case. We have seen what Daesh has done to other Muslims. We have seen the torture and the persecution. We have seen people being thrown off buildings, women being subjected to sexual slavery, and the sponsoring of bombs in Ankara and in Beirut, where Muslim upon Muslim has been butchered. Those are the arguments that we need to make to our British Muslim constituents who want to know that we are on the side of Islam as a peaceful religion, and that we are trying to get rid of this murderous death cult.

**Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): Two years ago I was opposed to military intervention in Syria, but in the light of the atrocities that took place in Paris last week—and particularly in the light of my right hon. Friend's statement, the way in which he has dealt with the issue, and the compelling case that he has made—I will support the motion when it is put to the House. Does he agree, however, that this is about ISIL, because it represents a clear and present danger to our constituents?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's support, and I can absolutely confirm that that is our aim. It is about dealing with ISIL.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I accept that ISIL presents a clear and present threat to this country, whether or not we are involved in bombing in Iraq or Syria or both: I need no convincing of what the terrorists' intentions are. I also welcome the Prime Minister's assurance that the motion that he will present to the House will rule out any mission creep beyond dealing with ISIL, but may I ask him to go further? I think that the weakness in his argument today relates to the question of who will occupy and control that territory if we force ISIL into retreat. Will he come back to us with more details, in order to convince us that action will result in the outcome that we desire?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to do that. I have tried to be very clear about the fact that there is not a perfect situation in Syria with huge amounts of ground forces that can do the job that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but it would be wrong to suggest that there are not any. I would also make the point that the more we can be seen to act, the more we can help to build up those forces.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): There are those who criticise our international aid budget, and, indeed, there has been some criticism in the press today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that aid is as important to our national security as it is in terms of our moral obligation to the rest of the world?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right. That is one of the reasons we are saying that we are going to refashion the budget to ensure that half of it focuses on fragile and conflict-bound states.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Thirty per cent. of ISIL-held land in Iraq has been retained, but 70% remains in its hands. Why is it not right for us to help our allies by clearing the problem of Daesh in Iraq, building a pluralistic state in which Sunnis see a potential future that they can support, and taking the commitment to Iraq before we move on to Syria?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady has asked a very good question, to which I think there are two answers. First, I do not think it is possible to complete the work in Iraq without dealing with Daesh in Syria; it does not recognise a border and we are recognising it. Secondly, although ISIL is a threat to us wherever it is, the head of the snake—the biggest part of the threat—is around Raqqa, which is in Syria.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): The people of Calder Valley will rightly want to know one key thing, and that is whether British action in Syria will make a real difference to the situation on the ground and help to make us safer at home. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that that will be the case?

**The Prime Minister:** I very much believe, on the basis of the military, security and intelligence advice that I have been given, that that is the case, and I can see it myself, because plot after plot against this country has come not just from ISIL, but from around Raqqa. It is ISIL in Syria that is the greater threat to us.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I must declare an interest, in that my husband has been a member of the UK armed forces.

The Prime Minister said that the proposed air involvement could be sustained for many months. Will he give us further clarification? For how many months is it considered that it can be sustained, or indeed would be required to be sustained, at this stage?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not want to put a timeframe on the action that we have to take, because obviously the time will depend on the success of degrading and deflating ISIL and the so-called caliphate. As I said in my statement, one of the reasons the allies would like us to take part is that because of the strength and stability of our armed forces, we are a country that can sustain them at a regular tempo of combat rather than surging them up and surging them back down. That makes us a particularly valuable ally in what will undoubtedly be a long and complex campaign.

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has made a reasoned and principled case for why we must act in Syria in the same way as we are acting in Iraq. Previous experience demonstrates, however, that post-conflict renewal is critical to our ongoing security, and the experience in Sinjar demonstrates that when ISIL leaves, it leaves a humanitarian desert behind it. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that plans are being made in the Department for International

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Development, so that when ISIL is finally defeated—as it will be—we shall be in a position to ensure that post-conflict reconstruction and renewal occurs, and occurs well? If that is not already happening, will he ensure that it does happen?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. and learned Friend has made an important point. As soon as areas are liberated from ISIL by, for instance, peshmerga forces or, indeed, Iraqi security forces, our aid budget can come into play, and we can assist at once. The sooner we help, the more we can deliver a real change, and the more we can deal with the issue of migration flow as well.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): Those in ISIL have proved themselves to be brutal and merciless killers, but they have recruits from many, many different places. If we can defeat ISIL/Daesh militarily, given that the nature of the threat and the mindset of its members, does that mean eradicating every single man and woman with a connection? If not, where and how do we intend to contain and detain those who are left until they no longer pose a terrorist threat to the places from which they have come?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman has asked a question that we could spend a whole day debating. What I will say is that the military action is only one part of a strategy to deal with the enormous problem of radicalised extremist Islam and the violence that it brings. We can do a certain amount with military action, but we need our counter-terrorism powers, we need our Prevent strategy, we need terrorism prevention and investigation measures, and we need strategies to deal with returning Syrian fighters. We need to do all those things, and—as I put it—it will be a generational struggle to get it right.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House—and, indeed, my constituents—that if a decision is made to extend air strikes into Syria, every effort will be made to keep people safe on the streets of Britain, especially during the Christmas period, when our towns and cities are especially busy?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has asked a very important question. This is part of the strategy to help keep us safe. We cannot deny the fact that there is a danger to our country now—the level of threat is set at severe, which means that an attack is highly likely—but we are already at that level, and the view of our intelligence and security services is that in terms of a threat from ISIL, we are already very high up on its target list.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister has rightly said that peace is a process, not an event. Will he assure me that, while the existence of a diplomatic process it is of course essential, the important effort to broker a political settlement could be made to run in parallel with necessary action to counter the very direct threat that we, as a country, undoubtedly face?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes. Given his own considerable military experience, the hon. Gentleman knows a lot about this, and he is completely right: these are parallel processes. I would not be in favour of military action if

I thought that it could somehow derail the political process. My view is that it will assist the political process, for the clear reasons that I have given.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, just as actions have consequences, so does inaction—for Syria, a country with which I am personally familiar, for the region, and for our own country—and that extending military action in a focused and proportionate way, in tandem with a diplomatic and political effort, offers the best hope for a safer future for both Syria and the United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend puts it very well. This is a comprehensive strategy that recognises we have to step up to the plate not just militarily but diplomatically and politically.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I assure the House that we all share the objective of defeating ISIS, but there are some critical questions, one of which, as the Prime Minister knows, is whether air strikes alone, without ground forces, can achieve the objective. He points to the 70,000 opposition troops, but there has been debate about that. Do our allies share the view that these are the appropriate troops to take to the ground, and how does he think we can realistically protect them as they do so, without getting into conflict with Russia and others?

**The Prime Minister:** Our allies do take the view that we can and should work with these people. The US has played a large role, as have we, in helping to build up and fund these forces.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): People are genuinely afraid of the ISIL extremist ideology threatening our way of life—children, men and women, including constituents in Taunton Deane, which might seem miles away but really is not. We cannot live like this. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will push ahead with the measures to defeat this ideology and include a plan to care for Syrians who genuinely have to flee and eventually return?

**The Prime Minister:** I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that we will go on doing all we can to help Syrians who have fled their homes. She puts it very well. In the end, we have to decide whether to act and confront this evil. In my view, if we do not act, we will be less safe.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The Prime Minister has referred to 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters, principally those of the Free Syrian Army, who do not belong to extremist troops and are ready to act. Only a few weeks ago, the FAC heard that there appeared to be little chance of a legitimate and functioning ally emerging from the chaos on the ground any time soon. What has changed?

**The Prime Minister:** Nothing has changed. We have given regular reports about supporting the Free Syrian Army and what we have done to try and bolster their forces, and I have given the House the most accurate statistics I can about their existence. We can either help build them up and work with them, or we can turn away and see their numbers attrited even more.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I welcome today's comprehensive analysis and clear plan, and I support the Prime Minister, but I am a little concerned about the level of collective resolve to deliver a benign and representative Government in Syria. Will he assure me that we will see this strategy through to the end and not pull out if the military and diplomatic advice he is receiving proves to be optimistic on timescales?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. The advice I am getting is that there is no quick or easy way of solving the problem. We have been committed for four years to humanitarian assistance and to the diplomatic process for many years—remember, we have had Geneva I, Geneva II and now Vienna. In the same way, this whole process will take a long time, and we should be clear about that.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): The Prime Minister has stressed that the ISIL-first strategy cannot extend to our intervening as an ally of Assad. In the memorandum to the FAC, he said that an intervention on such terms would be wrong on three grounds: it would misunderstand the causes of the problem; it would make matters worse; and Assad's rule is one of ISIL's greatest recruiting sergeants. Does he accept that those valid considerations against such intervention also persuade many of us against intervention on the terms he is commending? We do not want to feed the evil we want to defeat.

**The Prime Minister:** I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, but if we do not intervene against ISIL, we should not be surprised when it grows and threatens us more. Of course there are concerns and difficult questions—it is a complex situation—but, as I have said, just because a strategy is complicated and takes a long time does not mean it is not the right strategy and cannot work. If hon. Members are looking for complexity as a reason to say, "This is difficult, and therefore we cannot support it", they will not have any trouble finding it—it is complex—but in the end it comes down to some simple judgements about what will make us safer or less safe.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): As my right hon. Friend has said, defeating ISIL is the battle of our generation. Does he agree that ISIL are attacking not only our allies but us, attempting terrorist attacks in the UK and poisoning the minds of young people with their ideology? Is now not the time to step up our commitment and take the fight to their stronghold in Syria?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right. It is sometimes tempting to think, "If only we left these people alone, we would be safer and everything would be okay". When it comes to ISIL, that is a completely false prospectus. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, they hate us for what we are, not for what we do. It is worth noting that France was not involved in the Iraq war, yet it was attacked. These people have killed more Muslims than Christians. It is because of their distorted and perverted worldview that they make these attacks, and we should not stand by as they do so.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The Prime Minister is on the record as saying that the UK's unique contribution to the fight against Daesh is the Brimstone missile, but will he confirm that the Royal Saudi air force has been using the Brimstone missile against Daesh since February? What assessment has been made of its success in diminishing Daesh?

**The Prime Minister:** The Brimstone missile, which is a British missile worked on with the RAF and used before, is one of the most capable and accurate weapons systems there is, particularly in the hands of our highly trained RAF pilots. It is not just me saying this; it is the view of our military, as well as of our allies, who are keen for us to help.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I voted against action last time, but I am increasingly likely to support action this time, as long as it is against ISIS and does not involve ground troops. My right hon. Friend is trying to build an international coalition, of course, and yesterday he met the new Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, who won an election on the basis of pulling out of air strikes. Has he had any success in convincing him to change his mind?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I am grateful for my hon. Friend's growing support, which I hope to bring to a happy—for us both—conclusion—no, "conclusion" is the wrong word; it is a process, and a never-ending one, I hope.

I had good talks with Prime Minister Trudeau last night. He has made a particular decision about Canadian jets, but he is considering stepping up the training support they provide, particularly to the Iraqi security forces and the peshmerga.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): How much will the £1 billion put aside for reconstruction today compare with the total cost of the planned military action, given that the Prime Minister spent 13 times as much on bombing Libya as he did on reconstruction?

**The Prime Minister:** Obviously, the amount we spend on the military campaign will depend on how long it lasts, and the amount we spend on reconstruction will depend on how great the needs are, but I say to the hon. Gentleman—a citizen of the United Kingdom—that the UK aid budget is unrivalled almost anywhere in the world. We are capable of bringing an enormous amount to bear on reconstruction.

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): Like Members on both sides of the House, I came to this statement with a heavy heart, but the Prime Minister has made a compelling case and set out a comprehensive strategy, one of the most compelling elements of which was how Britain's precision capabilities can save civilian lives. May I encourage him to put saving lives including civilian lives, including Muslim lives, at the heart of any motion he brings before the House?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to do that, and I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): One of the lessons of Iraq was that the rapidity, scale and organisation of the aid

[Peter Kyle]

and reconstruction response need to match that of the military intervention. That was a positive lesson from Kosovo, where I played a small part as an aid worker. If the Prime Minister and the International Development Secretary can reassure us that this is the case, he will be able to count on my support.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments, particularly given his experience. My memory is that before Iraq there was a lot of discussion of, and planning for, humanitarian aid packages after the war but no plan for not destroying the institutions of the Iraqi state. As a result, the aid did not touch the sides of the subsequent crisis. This time, we would do things very differently, in the way he suggests.

**Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con):** The Prime Minister stated that some of our allies wanted us alongside them because of the unique capabilities that we can provide. Will he outline some of the key capabilities of the RAF that could be brought to bear in the region, and will he join me in paying tribute to its work?

**The Prime Minister:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the RAF's work. The things that I have, as it were, seen with my own eyes and discussed with RAF pilots are the reconnaissance airborne pod for Tornado, the RAPTOR pod—about which it is said that a Tornado could hover over the Isle of Wight and be able to read the hands on Big Ben, such is the capability of its high-definition camera—and the Brimstone missile, which has proved in test after test to be one of the most accurate weapons, with the lowest level of civilian casualties. Those two things are very important.

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** The Prime Minister spoke of a new Government in Syria that would govern for all the people. Will he explain how and when he envisages installing a Government that would represent and be supported by all sides in the aftermath of a bloody and immensely complicated civil war?

**The Prime Minister:** Obviously the emergence of a transition in Syria will require the Vienna process to work, and to work well. The reason I have greater confidence is that a few months ago there was no process. The Iranians, the Saudis, the Russians and the Americans are now all sitting round the table together. That is real progress.

**Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con):** It is clear from recent events that the airspace over Syria is very complex. Can the Prime Minister assure me that, if and when a proposal comes forward to mount air strikes against ISIL, there will be a co-ordination strategy between the various air forces that are taking action over Syria?

**The Prime Minister:** I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that guarantee. There is already a deconfliction strategy, and the RAF would be part of that. We can give further details closer to the time.

**Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** I was struck by what one of my constituents said last weekend, which was that the attacks that happened in Paris could

easily have happened in north Wales. There is no doubt that such attacks could happen not only in our major cities but in our towns and villages as well. There is immense concern about that. Let us assume that the House gives its support to the Prime Minister for these air strikes. Can he outline how he and his Secretaries of State will update the House on what is happening? If there is to be support, there must also be consensus afterwards.

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said, I am very happy to be guided by what the House would find most helpful. I think that regular updates from the Dispatch Box would be useful, and I would also be happy to have discussions with Select Committees as appropriate. Perhaps we could look at putting something into the motion, should a motion come forward, to guarantee regular updates so that colleagues could be kept informed.

**James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con):** We have heard shocking reports from the United Nations of the crimes against humanity perpetrated by ISIL against the civilian population in Syria, including the beheading of a female dentist for the crime of treating patients of both sexes. Does the Prime Minister agree that the only practicable way for us to hold the leadership of ISIL to account for these crimes against humanity is to engage in the type of military action that he is proposing?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He speaks clearly about this issue. Frankly, we should document the many crimes against Muslims in Syria and Iraq that are being carried out by this brutal organisation.

**Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP):** I was disappointed to hear the Prime Minister say that we cannot look back to what happened in Iraq, because if we do not look back, we will not learn anything. Would he concede that if the Chilcot inquiry had produced its report, we would be better informed as to how best to handle this complex situation?

**The Prime Minister:** First, if we had had our way over the Iraq inquiry from the start, it would have been published by now. I am not saying that we should not look back and learn. I am absolutely saying that we should look back and learn. Let us learn about the importance of clear processes, legal advice, the Joint Intelligence Committee and all those things. I think you have heard that today. The only point I am making is that we should not go back to what happened in Iraq and therefore enter a freeze where we are incapable of making the decisions that are necessary to keep our country safe in the future.

**Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con):** Daesh is obviously a material threat that needs to be challenged, and the Prime Minister has set that out well today, but will he tell us why he believes that the Russians and Iran would step back from backing Assad and attacking the Free Syrian Army when we attack the mortal enemy, Daesh?

**The Prime Minister:** This is obviously the conversation we have to have, particularly with the Russians. Up to now, they have said that Assad should on no account

go, and we have said that we want to see him go. As I have said, however, the gap between us has narrowed, because everybody accepts that there needs to be a transition. I have a strong view about Assad but, as I keep saying, it is not so much a political preference as a statement of fact: I do not think that that man is capable of leading a united Syria. That is not just my view; it is the view of the Syrian people. A growing understanding of that is one of the things that is driving forward the Vienna process.

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree with his former Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and with John Bolton, the former US ambassador to the UN, that ultimately the world will have to redraw the map and create a Sunni state in northern Iraq and northern Syria? If so, does he think that makes a resolution of the situation easier or harder?

**The Prime Minister:** I hope that that will not be necessary. I think we should try to respect the territorial integrity of those countries. There are many countries around the world that manage to hold together despite having ethnic and religious differences within them. It would be a slight counsel of despair to believe that we have to end up with a Sunnistan, a Shi'astan and a Kurdistan. We should try to do what those countries want, which is to help to bring them together.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): May I offer my right hon. Friend my complete support for the approach that he is taking? I hear what he says about the use of British ground troops, but the situation can change rapidly in conflicts. If it was in our military interests to deploy a limited number of ground troops, would he do that, and would he be required to come back to the House to gain our approval for such a deployment?

**The Prime Minister:** I have said what I have said about ground troops, and I do not propose to change that. The motion needs to set out clearly what I am seeking the House's permission to do. I would want that to be relatively clear and constrained; I would not want people to believe that some sort of mission creep was taking place. I am very happy to listen to people's views on what the motion should have in it.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Prime Minister has described Raqqa as the head of the snake but, as the story goes, when you cut the head off a snake, seven new heads grow. How can he ensure that the snake is not in fact a Hydra that will emerge stronger in other parts of the region, such as Libya or Tunisia?

**The Prime Minister:** There is a difference between snakes, with which I am quite familiar, and the Hydra of myth and legend. Maybe we need to have a deeper conversation about that. Look, it is not just my view that Raqqa is the head of the snake; it is. That is where the plots have come from, which is why acting only in Iraq and not in Syria is restricting our effectiveness.

**David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): Like many in the House, I am pleased that today's statement has a strong focus on post-conflict reconstruction. Can my right

hon. Friend tell the House how widely that priority is shared by our EU allies such as Germany and by the nearby Arab states?

**The Prime Minister:** I think it is widely understood that what must follow all this is a genuine reconstruction of Syria. Millions of people want to go home, and towns and cities will need to be rebuilt. An enormous amount of investment will need to go into the country, and once the conflict is over, that can begin. This has widespread support across the EU.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): There is a view that United Nations resolution 2249 does not provide unambiguous permission to use military action. Does the Prime Minister think that chapter VII of the United Nations charter would need to be invoked to allow military action?

**The Prime Minister:** I would say that the resolution is fairly comprehensive; I have read out some of the key terms in it. It was unanimously adopted and it has that key chapter VII language in it about "all necessary measures", even though it is not chapter VII itself. Look, in all these things, one can seek perfection or one can say, "We have UN backing, we have a political process, we have allies asking us to act and we have the advice from our intelligence and security forces about the dangers that we face." In the end, with all that, there comes a decision, and that is the decision I think we need to take.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): One of the things we have learned from the Iraq war is that, because of the difference of views, it aggravated the separation between British Muslims and the rest of the British population. That gave rise to an irrational fear of people because they were Muslims and led to an increase in the attacks on people in this country because they were Muslims. Is the Prime Minister sure that that will not happen again as a consequence of the decisions that he makes after today?

**The Prime Minister:** I always listen carefully to my hon. Friend, not least because he works so hard to represent a very multi-ethnic, multi-faith constituency in Bedford. My impression is that British Muslims are absolutely clear that Daesh/ISIL and this so-called "caliphate" have nothing to do with the religion they care about. I went to Friday morning prayers under the town hall in Chipping Norton recently, where the British Muslims in west Oxfordshire gather, and they all said that in unison; the first thing they said as I walked in the room was, "These terrible people. Prime Minister, they have got nothing to do with us." You feel their pain in having to say that, so I do not think we should fear that taking action will do damage in that way.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the Prime Minister give us his best estimate of the likelihood in reasonable time of a ceasefire between the major non-Daesh forces in Syria that would allow an effective deployment of ground troops to take and hold Daesh territory?

**The Prime Minister:** That is a very good question. The Vienna process is supposed to deliver that sort of ceasefire between the Free Syrian Army forces and

[*The Prime Minister*]

other moderate forces, and the Assad regime. Obviously, that would assist in the destruction of ISIL. It would not necessarily instantly add to the number of ground forces. But the argument I am making is about taking these steps in parallel; I do not believe we can afford to wait until all of these circumstances, including a transition in Syria, come about before we act. That is the crucial question the hon. Gentleman will have to ask himself.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): In order to succeed, I hope the Prime Minister will not leave the House, given the supportive mood here, and use his considerable brilliance and resources to draft a crafty motion when what he needs to be doing is forming those coalitions of ground troops that we all agree we so badly need.

**The Prime Minister:** Let me reassure my hon. Friend that there is no ambition to draft a crafty motion. I am trying to take as much of the House of Commons with me as I can in taking this important and difficult decision. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will have particular concerns: that there should not be mission creep; that this is about saving Muslim lives in the region as well as saving British lives at home; that there will be regular reports back to Parliament; and that this is part of an overall strategy. All those points, and others, can be properly set out in a motion that I hope would achieve the maximum support in this House.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): As one of those who voted against the war in the key vote on 18 March 2003, I listened with great care to the words the Prime Minister used. When he answered the Leader of the Opposition he said that our bombing was likely to reduce civilian casualties because of the accuracy of our munitions. Surely that could happen only if our action replaces current less accurate bombing rather than adds to bombing that is taking place. Is that what he meant? Will he outline that further?

**The Prime Minister:** That is very much what I meant. I think we should be stepping up what is happening in Syria, but given our accuracy, I would expect that, all things being equal, we would be taking the place in some instances of others and therefore the point the hon. Gentleman makes is valid.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): If each of our allies independently said, "Well, others are involved and therefore we don't need to get involved", how would we ever defeat ISIS?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. and learned Friend asks a very good question, which goes to this moral point: is it really a moral stance to say, "Our allies are taking the action that protects us, so therefore we don't need to act."? Without getting too deep into moral philosophy, if we take the Kantian imperative, we should be following them rather than standing away from them, because otherwise no one would take the action.

**Mr Speaker:** All colleagues should be familiar with the Kantian imperative. It is very helpful to be reminded of that by the Prime Minister.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Since the Prime Minister and I entered the House in 2001, we have been asked on four occasions to support military action. On some of those occasions I voted yes and on others I voted no, depending on the merit of the case. Nobody doubts the ability and bravery of the armed forces, but there is great doubt about the ground forces in Syria. My question to him is simply this: if increased bombing leads to increased refugees, will he reconsider the figure he has put on the number of refugees?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman is right to consider each case on its merits, and I hope he will consider this case very carefully. The decision with respect to Iraq has clearly shown benefits, and I believe the same can happen in Syria. On the refugee numbers, we have set out our plans. Of course we keep that under review and listen to the arguments, but the most important thing right now, particularly given some of the difficulties faced by the relocation programmes within the EU, is for us to get on and deliver. That is why I am very keen to restate that I am confident that we will have 1,000 people here by Christmas.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Military action in Syria may be a necessary part of stopping ISIL, but a diplomatic solution is vital. Can the Prime Minister reassure me and my constituents that if military action is taken, he will not take his eye off the ball on a political settlement?

**The Prime Minister:** I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. More of the philosophy: the military action is a necessary condition but it is certainly not a sufficient condition either to destroy ISIL or to build the peaceful Syria that we all want to see.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Prime Minister has spoken repeatedly about the need for a transition in Syria to a new Government, and there will be widespread support in this House for the process that was started in Vienna. I am concerned to get clarity on the Government's attitude in the here and now, because that process will take time. Is their view and advice to this House that a successful ground offensive can be undertaken against Daesh in Syria without the involvement or without reference to the existing Syrian armed forces?

**The Prime Minister:** The answer to that question is that with the ground forces that there are in Syria with whom we are working we can have additional impact on ISIL through carrying out the air strikes and the air-to-ground support that we are talking about. That can assist us—otherwise, I would not be standing here or arguing for it. Is it perfect? No, it is not. Would it be assisted by further ground troops, following a transition in Syria? Yes, it would. But action now can make a difference.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To have a chance of success, it is critical that political aims on the future of Syria are agreed by the coalition at the outset, which is not the case at the moment, and that a strategy is developed. That strategy needs to look at who will co-ordinate the ground troops, how they will manage that co-ordination, what will happen where

there are gaps in existing ground troops and, most importantly, how we will rebuild a country in which 60% of hospitals are already nearly destroyed or destroyed completely. Getting that political strategy agreed is more important than saying, "I hope it will come with air strikes."

**The Prime Minister:** I say to the hon. Gentleman that all those elements are in place: there is a co-ordination mechanism for troops on the ground; there is a plan to reconstruct this country after the war is over; and there is a plan for the transition to take place. Yes, it is complicated and it will take a long time, but that does not mean that there is not a plan, or that it is not the right one.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I admire the sincerity and conviction of the Prime Minister, but if after months of intensive bombing the Free Syrian Army cannot take Raqqa and has become mired in atrocities it is committing, and there is limited progress on a wider settlement, what will he then ask this House to do?

**The Prime Minister:** I will come back to the House regularly and update it on the progress made. In Iraq, we have made progress: we have seen a reduction of 30% in ISIL's territory, and it is definitely less capable in Iraq than it was. I believe we can have a similar effect in Syria, and I will report back regularly. As I say, we are not dealing with perfection here; we are dealing with the action that I believe we can take that will help to keep us safe, and that will progressively work to degrade and destroy this so-called "caliphate"; that is what we are discussing, and I will give regular progress reports.

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): The Prime Minister said in his statement that there was "daily contact and pragmatic military planning to ensure the safety of all coalition forces." Given the shooting down of the Russian plane by Turkey, one of our NATO allies, and the massive dangers that entails in terms of escalation, can he say a little more on the communications strategy between the anti-Daesh forces that he foresees?

**The Prime Minister:** If we were to take part in this action, we would be part of the clearance mechanism that there is between the American-led coalition and the Russians to make sure that these things are deconflicted. The issue for us does not arise with Turkey, because we have overfly rights and Turkey is part of the coalition against ISIL. Clearly, work needs to be done between Russia and Turkey, but that is quite separate from any consideration we would have.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Should not intervention follow the effective assembly of local ground forces and an international coalition, rather than be a catalyst for them? Given that the Assad regime is responsible for the overwhelming number of atrocities and deaths in Syria, does the Prime Minister agree that any action we take that sustains that regime is unacceptable?

**The Prime Minister:** We believe that taking this action will help to bolster the ground troops that are there. The fact is that, although they have had the support of Britain, America, the Arab states and others, they have

had a miserable time, and because of the activities of the regime and of ISIL, they have faced a very difficult situation. The question for us is: does the action that I am proposing help them? Yes, it does. Does it help to bring about a political solution? Yes, it does. Crucially, does it help to keep us safe here at home? Yes, I very much believe that it does.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Military intervention requires a just cause, and the Prime Minister has argued for that just cause superbly today; and intervention has to be done with good intention, and he has shown today that it would be. For those in the House who are still uncertain, the weakness of the analysis is around the winnability strategy on the ground, and the need to not create a vacuum that will be filled by something worse.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. As I have said, there is no 100% certainty; there is no perfection here. When we talk about winnability, I think about the dangers to us right now. I am talking about losability to our people, our country and our safety. We have to think about the danger of inaction, as well as all the uncertainties of action.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Ian Paisley.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for the exercise. Two and a half hours into this statement, will the Prime Minister share with the House some of the details of the seven foiled plots? I am talking about the nature or the targets of the attacks, the cities, the spread of those attacks, and how serious they were for the entire United Kingdom.

**The Prime Minister:** I must be careful in what I say. From time to time, the Home Affairs Committee interviews the director general of our Security Service, and he may be able to give more detail. What we have seen to date is a series of attacks either inspired by ISIL's propaganda or directed by it. Obviously, we had the attacks that we avoided that were the product of Hussain and Khan, who have since been neutralised by the action that we have taken. The reason for such enhanced concern today is that what we were seeing with ISIL were attacks that were fairly ill planned, but that relied on radicalised individuals to take rapid action, sometimes with a knife, and sometimes in other ways. We have seen with Paris a change to a much more planned and thought-through attack strategy, such as we used to see with al-Qaeda when it was embedded in the badlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan. That is one reason for the heightened concern. That combination of desperate psychopathic killers and a higher element of planning that the Paris attacks showed is one reason why my concern leads me to believe that we have to act, and act now.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): The hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) reminded us of the three absolute prerequisites that need to be in place before military action can be justified. If the only objective is to reduce the likelihood of attacks on UK citizens in the United Kingdom, we can argue that any attack on Daesh is effective. If we also want to ensure

[Peter Grant]

that we do not leave behind an environment in which a new Daesh can find encouragement, we have to do more. A ceasefire among the warring non-Daesh factions in and around Syria is not a striving for perfection, but an absolute requirement. Today, the Prime Minister has given us no cause for optimism that such a ceasefire is imminent. Will he tell us what pressure will be put on our NATO ally, Turkey, to stop bombing the Kurds, so that the Kurds can concentrate on working with us to get rid of Daesh?

**The Prime Minister:** The whole concept of ceasefires has come a lot closer because of the Vienna process. Frankly, those ceasefires between moderate Syrian opposition forces and Government forces would be helped by a more concerted effort to degrade and destroy ISIL in Syria. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's main question, I am not arguing that there is a military-only solution to this conflict. There needs to be political, diplomatic, humanitarian and post-conflict reconstruction action. I come to the House with a strategy for all those things. I say to Members of the Scottish National party that I hope that they will give this matter their fullest possible thought. They do not have to vote as one block; they can think about these important issues and come to a considered opinion.

**Mr Speaker:** Patience rewarded: I call Mr Danny Kinahan.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I thank you, Mr Speaker. The exercise has done me a lot of good, too. I thank the Prime Minister for taking so much time to talk to us as parties and give us all a chance to ask questions. We want to see Daesh totally defeated, but I wish to frame my question in this way: will we see more aid—military, medical and humane—on the ground as soon as possible, and given to those whom we trust? We need to work with Baghdad to make sure that the aid gets to them accurately, particularly to the internally displaced persons who are not getting all that has been passed over to them.

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. There is a plan already in place for putting in the aid and the assistance, and particularly the military assistance to the Iraqi Government. Over time, there is more that we can do for the moderate Syrian opposition. All of that is part of a strategy that can keep us safer here while building a more secure and stable middle east. In the end, that is what this is about. I hope that the clear sight and clarity of argument that the Ulster men and women bring to this argument will find them in the right Division Lobby at the end of the process.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister. No fewer than 103 Back Benchers have had the opportunity to question him in 130 minutes of exclusively Back-Bench time. I hope that colleagues feel that they have had an adequate opportunity to speak.

## Business of the House

1.16 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

**MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER**—General debate on the UK's role in the middle east. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee. I pay tribute to its members for picking something that will be of interest to the whole House at this moment.

**TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER**—Remaining stages of the Immigration Bill, followed by motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to Northern Ireland, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill.

**WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER**—Opposition day (12th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

**THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER**—Second Reading of the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill [*Lords*].

**FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER**—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 7 December will include:

**MONDAY 7 DECEMBER**—Remaining stages of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill [*Lords*].

**TUESDAY 8 DECEMBER**—Consideration of Lords Amendments, followed by debate on a motion relating to European measures.

**WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER**—Opposition day (13th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

**THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER**—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 11 DECEMBER**—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 3 and 7 December will be:

**THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER**—General debate on fisheries policy.

**MONDAY 7 DECEMBER**—Debate on an e-petition relating to the use of neonicotinoids on crops.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly commend the Prime Minister for the way he has treated the House in relation to Syria. He has been commendable thus far, but these are very weighty matters, so it would be absolutely wrong for the Government to try to bounce the House into a decision. The Leader of the House has announced next week's business, but, to be honest, I thought I heard the Prime Minister say earlier that he wanted a debate and vote as soon as possible and before he visits the Foreign Affairs Committee. I can only presume that that means next week.

I just hope that the Leader of the House will take on board the fact that the House needs proper notice of debates and votes of that kind, and that it would be inappropriate to hide that from the House. Given that 103 Members spoke in this statement, 103 Members may want to speak in a debate. We therefore need

proper time so that Members do not just make two-minute speeches at the end of the day on a matter that really concerns our constituents.

I also hope that the Government will table a motion in plenty of time for Members to be able to consider it and decide whether they want to table amendments to it, rather than their having to table manuscript amendments on the day.

Mr Speaker, just like you, I came into work this morning with a sword. I am delighted to announce that, last night, thanks to the efforts of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), who is still in his seat, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), Chris Symonds, one of our Doorkeepers, and myself, the Commons wrested the mighty Wilkinson sword off their lordships in a charity swimming championship for the Northern Ireland charity, Hope for Youth.

Speaking of double-edged swords, last week I asked the Leader whether he could tell us the dates of the recesses for next year, and he got all pompous about it and said, “Oh no, it is far more important for the Government to get their business through than for anybody to be able to go on holiday.” I shall ask a completely and utterly different question today, which is instead of telling us when we will not be sitting, can he tell us when we will be sitting, and then we will work out the recess dates from that? It cannot be very difficult, surely.

The Chancellor said something yesterday that I thought was very interesting:

“The improvement in the nation’s finances is due to two things.”—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 1359, c. 602.]

I completely agree: smoke and mirrors. That is what is down to. I first predicted that the Government would do a U-turn on working tax credits on 15 October, and the Leader yet again went all pompous and Grayling on us and started moaning about a great constitutional crisis that was stalking the land. Now that the Chancellor has accepted my advice, will the Leader clarify two things? First, what is the status of the Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) (Amendment) Regulations 2015, which were voted down in the House of Lords and are still hanging around in the air? Does the Leader intend to bring them back in a different form? Secondly, according to the Resolution Foundation, low-income families on universal credit will still be worse off by £1,300 in 2020, and according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies in the last half hour, the spending review will leave 2.6 million families £1,600 worse off next year. So it is not really a reverse, is it? It is time that the Government owned up.

May we have a debate about the sale of UK national assets? Since this Chancellor came to office he has sold off the student loan book, the Royal Mail and the future of our nuclear power industry, and he announced yesterday that he will sell off the Land Registry, the Ordnance Survey, air traffic control and the Green Investment Bank. I have a little book here that I will give to the Leader of the House. I will not throw it across the Chamber; he can come up to my study later. It is a copy of Shakespeare’s play “Richard II”. I am sure hon. Members will remember that wonderful speech:

“This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,

This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,

This other Eden, demi-paradise”,

but do they remember that it ends:

“Is now leas’d out... like to a tenement or pelting farm”?

That is what the Tories have done. Shakespeare predicted 400 years ago that they would sell off all our national assets.

May we have a debate on the Chancellor’s boast on page 76 of the Blue Book—I am sure that you have seen this, Mr Speaker, because it pertains to you—that

“the government has taken a series of steps to reduce the cost of politics”?

That is not true, is it? It is not true at all. The cost and the number of special advisers, who are purely party political appointees, have risen dramatically since 2010. In 2009 there were 74, costing £5.9 million, and in 2014 there were 103, costing £8.4 million. The Prime Minister promised, before he became Prime Minister, that no Minister of his would have more than one special adviser, but the Leader of the House has two, the Chief Whip has two and the Chancellor alone has at least 10. We do not know the total number of special advisers now, because the Government will not publish a list, but in 2014 it was 29 more Spads at a cost of £2.5 million more a year. On top of that the Prime Minister has appointed Members of the House of Lords faster than any other Prime Minister in history—240 in all, costing an extra £2.9 million a year.

The annual Tory party invoice to the taxpayer has gone up by £5.4 million. But yesterday the Chancellor said that he will cut the money provided to Opposition parties—to all Opposition parties—by 19%. I would gently remind the Leader of the House that what goes around comes around. Will the Leader confirm that this is not actually up to the Chancellor; it is up to this House? Will he confirm that every previous change to Short money was made on the basis of cross-party consultation? Was there any discussion with the Opposition parties? Was there any discussion with the Finance Committee of this House or with the Members Estimate Committee? Did the Leader of the House know about this proposal when he sat at the last meeting of the Members Estimate Committee?

When Labour was in government we were never afraid of proper scrutiny, so we introduced Short money, and we increased it in 1997. That meant that the Tory party received—it claimed—£45.7 million from the taxpayer between 1997 and 2010. Will the Tory party now be taking a 19% cut in the cost of special advisers? If not, will not voters be right to conclude that this is a naked attempt to hobble the Opposition and rig the system? It is a purely partisan measure being introduced because the Government just hate scrutiny.

Finally, two weeks ago, the Leader of the House urged all Members to do the online fire safety training. I have done it. Has he done it yet?

**Chris Grayling:** Yes.

I thank the shadow Leader of the House for his kind words about the Prime Minister. We should all be grateful to my right hon. Friend for the length of time he spent in the House this morning for what I thought was a very measured and sensible event. This is a serious matter that should cross party divides. It is for all of us to consider what is in the interests of our nation. I thought the tone of this morning’s discussion was excellent.

[Chris Grayling]

The hon. Gentleman asked about future business and the potential for a debate on a motion. I am sure that everyone would agree that it is right and proper for the Prime Minister to go away and digest the comments from the House this morning before deciding what further action to take, and to give the Foreign Affairs Committee time to consider the response that has been given. We will come back to the House shortly, and the Prime Minister will undoubtedly make clear his intentions in the very near future.

I paid tribute a couple of weeks ago to the musical skills of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). I hope that he will forgive me if I say that he is clearly not alone in this place in showing such skills. I pay tribute to the members of the Parliament Choir for their polished and professional concert at Cadogan Hall last night. It is not often that this place is talked of in terms of harmony and melody, but last night that was clearly the case.

Following a request from the shadow Leader a couple of weeks ago, I always try to mark important anniversaries on a Thursday morning, and this week I have two that, after yesterday, will probably have great resonance for him. It is exactly 30 years since Neil Kinnock began his purge of militant infiltrators from the Labour party. By extraordinary coincidence, 80 years ago this month the Chinese Communist party picked its new leader—yes, Mr Speaker, Chairman Mao, the man who became one of the most brutal dictators of modern times. After yesterday, I wonder which of those two anniversaries the shadow Leader will be celebrating the most.

The shadow Leader made a point about his victory and success in wresting the Wilkinson sword from the Lords, and I congratulate him on that. I saw his Twitter feed showing him coming into the House this morning carrying a 3-foot-long sword. Given his track record in knifing Tony Blair, I wonder whether this marks the start of another leadership assassination. If so, after yesterday, I suspect the hon. Gentleman would be a hero among his colleagues.

The shadow Leader asked about special advisers. I remind him that the cost of politics is falling. We have cut advertising and support for ministerial offices. The hon. Gentleman made a point about Short money. In fact, Short money has risen in total by 50% since 2010. After the changes set out yesterday, it returns to the level it was set at in 2010. If the Opposition are that desperate for money, they should just go and get more from their union paymasters.

The shadow Leader asked about the debate on the autumn statement. He used the joke about smoke and mirrors. I was rather disappointed because we heard that joke yesterday from the hon. Member for Cardiff North—

**Chris Bryant:** Cardiff West.

**Chris Grayling:** Cardiff West then. The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) made that joke yesterday. What the shadow Leader did not say is that he wants a two-day debate on the autumn statement next week, although after yesterday I think the Opposition have probably heard quite enough about the package.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the tax credits changes. Of course, the statutory instrument will not be moved, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out yesterday, because we are not pursuing those proposals.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the position of working families in 2020. The introduction of the national living wage means that by 2020 someone on today's minimum wage will be earning nearly £5,000 a year more than they do today.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of the sale of assets. I simply say that, as we look to build a new nuclear industry in this country, I look back to the occasion when the previous Government sold a British nuclear power station firm, Westinghouse, overseas, at a time when we were just thinking about building new nuclear power stations. I will take no lessons on the sale of assets from a party that takes steps without strategy and without thought. One of the reasons we have a challenge in energy generation today is that, for 13 years, Labour did nothing about it.

The hon. Gentleman asked about recess dates, and he will keep coming back to this. I simply say to him again that the prime concern for this Government is to get our business through the House. We will seek to deliver appropriate recess time when we can, but right now I am more concerned about putting through the manifesto on which we were rightly elected last May.

**Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): The most egregious unreformed procedures in this House relate to private Members' Bills. The conduct of this place in the execution of those Bills is simply appalling. May I urge the Leader of the House to join the Procedure Committee in trying to find a way forward? If I am Holmes in this matter, our hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is now my Moriarty.

**Chris Grayling:** Our hon. Friend has been referred to as many things, but never, I think, as Moriarty. I understand the point my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) makes, and as Chair of the Procedure Committee he is better placed than anyone to address concerns about the private Members' Bill process. As he knows, I am always happy to appear in front of his Committee and to discuss these matters, and I have no doubt that, as usual, he and his Committee will come out with wise words about how they should be handled in future.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. I apologise to him for having neither Chairman Mao nor Shakespeare to offer him this afternoon.

Regarding the debate on Syria, Scottish National party Members remain concerned that nothing has been timetabled. We need to see firm proposals on when the matter will be brought to the House, particularly because, as the Speaker said, 103 Members spoke during the statement today. We have to have sufficient time so that Back Benchers are not awarded just two or three minutes to speak but are allocated time properly to raise the serious concerns they may have about the proposed military action. Will the Leader of the House at least

say today that his intention is that we will have a minimum of two days to debate any Syrian action before a vote is taken?

I know there was a lot of talk about smoke and mirrors, or mirrors and smoke, in yesterday's autumn spending review announcement, and although we welcome very much the grinding U-turn performed on tax credits, we remain very concerned about what is proposed further down the line. As we have heard, the IFS has already started to voice concern about what will happen when universal credit and all the other reforms at the sharp end of housing benefit have been put in place. We know that the roll out of universal credit has been less than a success—I think the word “shambles” could be associated with it—so may we have a debate on where we are with universal credit and how it will impact on the plans for tax credits? It would be useful to have a statement from the Government on that, too.

Something dramatic happened in the House of Lords last week—little dramatic happens there, but for some reasons it did in the good old House of cronies. The Lords said that the Scotland Bill should be delayed until the critical fiscal framework was agreed. As the last Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland put it, passing a Scotland Bill without a sufficient fiscal framework it is like purchasing a car without looking at the engine. How are the Government responding to those calls and what efforts are they making to get that engine in place?

Another dramatic news story today is the immigration figures, with net immigration reaching a record high of 336,000, according to the Office for National Statistics. SNP Members question the Government's ability to get immigration down to the tens of thousands, which was their objective. We live in an interconnected, globalised world, so it was almost impossible from the outset. The Government are therefore likely to raise their rhetoric on immigration; we just hope that they do not conflate it with their responsibility and duty in relation to Syrian refugees—particularly if we are going to get down to the whole business of further bombing in Syria, which will increase those obligations. A commitment and a statement that the Conservatives—particularly their more bellicose Back Benchers—will not conflate the issues of the immigration figures and the treatment of Syrian refugees would be welcome.

Finally, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for his continued commitment and affection for the work of MP4, the parliamentary rock band. May I extend to him an invitation to join us in the Strangers Bar on Tuesday, for our annual get-together and gig? He will be welcome, and if he wants to make a musical contribution, that will be welcome, too.

**Chris Grayling:** I will be delighted to pop into the Strangers Bar next Tuesday. I think the House is going after 7 o'clock anyway. I do not know when the hon. Gentleman plans to start, but I will be delighted to come and hear him in full flow.

I have set out the business for the next two weeks. Clearly, if we are to have a debate on Syria in the next two weeks, I will need to return to the House to make a supplementary business statement. I will do that when the Government have reached a view and when people have had the chance to consider the comments made by Members in all parts of the House today. I am not

indicating the time and the timing, but if that debate should intrude in the next couple of weeks' business—it should take place within the couple of weeks—obviously, I will come back and make a further statement to the House.

Regarding tax credits and universal credit, I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that the move from the national minimum wage to the national living wage will, for Scots as well, deliver by 2020 an increase in income of almost £5,000. That, I believe, will make a fundamental difference to people on low incomes and is something we should all welcome. It will transform the lives of many people on the lowest incomes.

On the delay to the Scotland Bill, I simply say that just because someone asks for something or proposes it, that does not mean it will actually happen. The Government have made a commitment to delivering the Scotland Bill as quickly as possible. I am delighted that Lord Smith has now accepted that the Smith commission report is being implemented in full by the Scotland Bill. I wait with interest to see what powers the Scottish National party actually uses, because up to now it has talked a lot about powers but shown little sign of using them.

On immigration and Syrian refugees, we have set out clearly our international obligations to help Syrian refugees. We are taking 20,000 into this country, but crucially we are doing what other nations are not, in our view, doing to anything like the degree that is necessary, and that is providing support on the ground to the several million refugees who are in camps close to Syria. Their need is acute and they have not been able to make their way to Europe, so as we head into the winter months there is a real need to provide support on the ground and to help them. They are in deep difficulty, and we are doing more than almost anybody else to look after them.

Finally, I was deeply disappointed to see that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) missed out on *The Herald* prize for the best Scot at Westminster. I am sure I am not alone among Conservative MPs in saying that, had we had a vote, we would have put our tick in his box.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am keen to accommodate interest, but we had a very heavy exchange before this statement—rightly so—and more than 20 hon. Members wish to contribute in the debate on airports. These exchanges must therefore conclude no later than 2 pm. I hope that colleagues will tailor their contributions accordingly.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): The Rugeley skyline is dominated by Rugeley B power station, which provides enough electricity for about half a million homes. After the announcement last week that coal-fired power stations will be phased out by 2025, may we have a debate in Government time to discuss the conversion of coal-fired stations to biomass?

**Chris Grayling:** This is an important subject. We have taken the view that, to meet our environmental commitments and for reasons of cost and practicality, we should make greater use of gas and renewables. It is undoubtedly part of the Government's strategy and will be part of local planning strategies to reuse existing sites for electricity generation, where that is possible.

[Chris Grayling]

I shall certainly make sure that the Energy Secretary is aware of my hon. Friend's concerns, so she can address them the next time she speaks in the House.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Even before yesterday's announcements, Dudley Council was losing half its funding, forcing councillors there to make terrible decisions about front-line services such as our museum and libraries—places I have been visiting since I was a child. We all know that savings have to be made, but is it fair that Dudley is losing £61 per person, whereas Windsor is losing only £18 per person? May we have a debate, with a Communities and Local Government Minister responding, so he can tell the people of Dudley why that is fair?

**Chris Grayling:** The overall package that was announced yesterday provides a range of different support to local government. The hon. Gentleman will make a comparison between the area that he represents and areas that Government Members represent. After years of Labour government, the support provided to areas in typically Conservative parts of the country was minimal, whereas the support provided to Labour areas was very generous. If we are taking decisions that impact upon Labour areas, it is purely because the grant levels to Conservative areas are very low.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): On Tuesday the national confidential enquiry into patient outcome and death—NCEPOD—reported on sepsis. It reported that patients are at risk of death or long-term complications, often because of critical delays in identifying and treating the condition. Cases of sepsis have increased by 8% over the past three years and cause 44,000 deaths in the UK annually. It is now the leading cause of avoidable death in the UK. As the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on sepsis, may I ask the Leader of the House to consider a debate in Government time on sepsis, so that we can discuss this matter with the Minister and find out how we can improve the recognition and treatment of sepsis and how we can better measure its long-term burden on our health services?

**Chris Grayling:** I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the work she is doing. This is a condition that affects a large number of people and can have a dramatic effect on them and their families. It is precisely the kind of subject that I would encourage her to bring to the Backbench Business Committee? It will affect constituents of Members across the House, and it is for this purpose that that time is allocated.

**Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): We are not against cutting the cost of politics, but when Short money is cut and that impacts on smaller parties in this House, whose Members come here and make an effort to contribute, whereas nothing is done to cut the allowances of Members from Northern Ireland who do not bother to turn up and do not make a contribution to this House, it leaves us questioning why the Government have done this.

**Chris Grayling:** Clearly, over the coming days we will have discussions with all the parties affected by the change, including with the right hon. Gentleman's party.

As he is well aware, the politics of Northern Ireland are complicated and our prime desire is to ensure that we continue to see Northern Ireland peaceful, developing and prosperous.

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May we have a statement on the Syrian refugee relocation programme so that we can establish the facts of which local authorities are taking refugees in? Unfortunately, local authorities such as Derby City Council are playing party politics with people's lives, leading to misinformation on what is actually happening?

**Chris Grayling:** Let us be clear. As a nation we collectively have a duty to do what we can for Syrian refugees. I do not know the exact circumstances in Derby, but it would never be excusable for anyone in this country to mix party politics with the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Yesterday, while the Chancellor was still on his feet, the Government sneaked out an announcement that they intend to renege yet again on their commitment to carbon capture and storage by withdrawing the billion-pound funding that they promised in their manifesto just a few months ago. That is a disgraceful act of betrayal. It sends an appalling signal to companies seeking to invest in our energy sector, and it makes a mockery of the UK's commitment to decarbonisation just days before global talks on climate change. When will the Secretary of State come to the House and make a statement to explain to my constituents in Peterhead why they have been led up the garden path again?

**Chris Grayling:** We had to take some difficult decisions in yesterday's spending review. On renewables, we have made huge progress since 2010. In the second quarter of this year more than 25% of our energy was generated from renewable sources. That is a powerful indicator of the way in which we have put money into renewables, which are playing a bigger role in our society.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Education to come to the Dispatch Box next week and give a statement about the quality of history education in our country? I want to make certain that every youngster in the Ribble Valley has the opportunity to look at the ideology of great historical figures—for example, Chairman Mao—and compare the thoughts in the little red book, of which we are now grateful to have a copy, to what actually happened during his rule, which was repression, torture, a cultural wasteland and the death of 45 million people in the famine?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. That question was far too long. Questions from now on must be shorter; otherwise there will be a delay in getting on to the debate, of the substantial number of contributors to which I have already informed the House.

**Chris Grayling:** I understand the point that my hon. Friend was making. I notice that the shadow Leader of the House has brought the Blue Book with him, rather than a red book. His usual chirpiness from the Labour

Benches rather disappeared yesterday when the red book appeared. My hon. Friend makes a good point. Nobody should treat lightly the works of brutal dictators.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I start with an apology to you, Mr Speaker, as I tried to raise a point of order during the Chancellor's statement after he had answered me. That was clearly incorrect and I apologise.

Will the Leader of the House make a statement telling us how he is going to make sure that he has managed to answer questions accurately? *Hansard* shows that yesterday I asked if the Scottish revenue block grant would be cut in real terms, and the Chancellor's answer was:

"The block grant is going up"—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1406.],

but his own Blue Book shows clearly that there will be a real-terms cut of 5%. What does the Leader of the House intend to do? Will he advise us whether the Chancellor is incompetent?

**Chris Grayling**: Fortunately, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be back here on Tuesday. The hon. Gentleman will be able to put that question to him and raise with him the issues that he has just raised with me.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the Prime Minister to make the ton today with the number of Back-Bench questions he answered. Syria is such an important issue and we need to debate it fully, so when the Leader of the House comes to the House with a change in the business programme, may I suggest that we debate Syria with no limit on when the closure comes, so that if necessary we can speak through the night before voting? Then everyone can get in.

**Chris Grayling**: I note carefully the comments of my hon. Friend. We are all going to be digesting the Prime Minister's statement, the submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee, and the concerns expressed in the House today, and on Monday we have a full day's debate. I encourage Members to use that debate as an opportunity to raise further concerns that they have about this. I know that the Prime Minister will read it carefully. He wants to take note of the views of people in all parts of the House. He believes in what he said today, but he wants to take the House with him.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Buried in the comprehensive spending review documents yesterday was the announcement that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will continue to contract out its debt collection, fraud and error compliance and tax credits system to private providers, calling it an astonishingly successful implementation of that contract. This is the same private sector contractor Concentrix that has sent threatening letters to many of our constituents who are tax credit recipients even though its many mistakes have caused serious financial hardship. Will the Government set aside time for debate on whether tax credit debt collection has been successful? Will the Leader of the House make representations for this failed provider, Concentrix, to be ruled out of future tenders?

**Chris Grayling**: I will make sure that the Treasury Ministers are aware of the concerns that the hon. Lady has raised. They are back here next Tuesday. I do not want to see any legitimate claimant of tax credits accused of doing something wrong. At the same time, people have a duty to watch over their affairs and ensure that if they are paid too much money, they notify the relevant authorities. Both need to be got right.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): My constituent, Mr Crewe, suffered a serious loss of funds from his bank, Barclays, possibly through theft, and I do not believe that the bank has taken this matter seriously enough. May we have a debate on the way in which banks, which are custodians of their customers' funds, treat such matters?

**Chris Grayling**: I obviously cannot comment on the individual circumstance, but in today's world where innocent customers can be the victims of electronic fraud or even sometimes fraud within institutions, I would always expect banks to put their customers first in dealing with such an issue, and to ensure that they are dealt with properly and decently and not left disadvantaged as a result. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Does the Leader of the House share my disappointment at recent irresponsible newspaper headlines and misleading reports that will have done nothing constructive to make anyone safer, but will have put our Muslim communities at further risk of Islamophobic abuse? May we have a statement on the importance of responsible use of language—for instance, using the term Daesh rather than Islamic State within and outside this House?

**Chris Grayling**: Let us be clear on this. The current threat that we face in this country has nothing whatever to do with the vast, vast majority of Muslims in this country and elsewhere in the world. It is being propagated by a tiny minority. That tiny minority must be dealt with where necessary with full force and effectiveness, but we in this House need to send out a message to the Muslim community as a whole in this country that they are valued people in our country and that we absolutely accept that they have nothing to do with what is going on.

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Saturday 5 December is Small Business Saturday, which encourages people to use small retailers and businesses, of which the Isle of Wight has many. Will the Leader of the House assist us in getting a debate on the subject and on other initiatives that promote independent local companies?

**Chris Grayling**: Small Business Saturday is a very worthwhile event, and I urge Members of all parties to support their local businesses in the coming days. If I may, I will give a plug to the Epsom and Ewell business awards, which I launched five years ago and which have their finals tonight. I look forward to presenting the awards at the end of today's business.

We have a debate on Small Business Saturday in the House in the next few days, and I hope that all Members will join in the events that are taking place to support people who work immensely hard and deliver essential services for our society.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): At the national steel summit in Rotherham, the Business Secretary promised that the three working groups that he had set up would report back before Christmas on the actions to be taken on steel. May we have a statement so that the Business Secretary can report to the House on the progress that is being made?

**Chris Grayling:** I will remind the Business Secretary about that commitment. We all take the future of the steel industry immensely seriously, and yesterday's statement contained provisions on high energy users and energy costs. We realise that there is a lot to do, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Business Secretary and members of the Business, Innovation and Skills ministerial team take the issue immensely seriously.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the Leader of the House kindly explain what opportunities there are to discuss the recognition available to armed forces personnel, including some marines in Taunton Deane, who have served in often highly dangerous counter-piracy operations off the horn of Africa? If that recognition comes in the form of a medal, will those brave men and women be able to wear that medal proudly, which is not the case with all medals?

**Chris Grayling:** One or two Members have raised that issue before, and I find it baffling that we even have to discuss it. My view is that if somebody serves our nation and is awarded a medal for doing so, they should be able to wear it. I wish my hon. Friend well in her campaign. She has my support for what she is trying to do, and I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Defence is well aware of what I think is just plain common sense.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I ask for a statement, or a debate in Government time, on industrial and employee relations in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency? May I impress upon the Leader of the House—I will be brief, Mr Speaker—three recent developments? They are a staff survey confirming that the DVSA has been voted 98th out of 98 in job satisfaction and employee engagement, an email from the chief executive's office referring to employees as "zombies", and the current industrial action on contractual changes. Is this any way to treat public sector workers?

**Chris Grayling:** What the hon. Gentleman describes is obviously concerning, and I am sure it will be a matter of concern to the Roads Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). The ministerial team from the Department for Transport will be in the House the week after next and will undoubtedly be able to address the question that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I will make sure his concerns are drawn to their attention before that day.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): It is with great sadness that I inform the House that earlier this week a constituent of mine, a 97-year-old woman, was the victim of a horrific and cowardly burglary. Will the Leader of the House help me secure a debate about the public services and authorities protecting vulnerable people, so that I can get it on the record that Cardiff

Council waste services should not have orange diamonds on bins, which highlight to criminals who in our city is vulnerable?

**Chris Grayling:** Any incident such as that is absolutely shocking, and all Government Members would express our dismay that anybody could commit such an appalling crime against such an elderly lady. It defies logic and belief. My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I will make sure that it is drawn to the attention of Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Leader of the House will recall that on 22 October, I asked whether there would be an air accidents investigation branch report on the Clutha crash in Glasgow. That report was published on 23 October and made seven recommendations. May I ask why no statement has yet been made, one month on from that, and remind the House that the anniversary of the crash is this Sunday, 29 November?

**Chris Grayling:** It is clearly a very sad anniversary for the families of all those who lost their lives and for those who were injured and affected. We send our heartfelt sympathies to them before a very difficult weekend.

The report has now been published and left a lot of questions unanswered about the circumstances that led to the crash. I will make sure that the Aviation Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), is aware of the hon. Lady's comments. Transport Ministers will be in the House on Thursday week, so she can make that point to them again.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): On Sunday the Jaskomal Foundation, based in Bedford, is holding a drive for people of Asian origin to join the bone marrow donation register. The Anthony Nolan Trust has shown that the likelihood of a match falls from 60% for the overall population to 20% for people of African or Asian origin. May I take the Leader of the House's best wishes to the Jaskomal Foundation for its efforts, and may we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Health about how we can improve the ratio?

**Chris Grayling:** I am sure my hon. Friend can send the good wishes of all parties for that immensely important work. I would add that when people in this country express any concern about its cosmopolitan nature, one reply that I give them is that some of the strongest elements of community are found in the minority and migrant communities. People in those communities do a really strong and important job for our society, and we should pay tribute to them for their work.

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): During yesterday's autumn statement, the shadow Chancellor made some comments that illustrated a rather abject and glaring lack of understanding of defence. May we have a debate in the next week or two on the strategic defence and security review, which was announced earlier in the week, so that all Members can get a better understanding of defence, even the shadow Chancellor?

**Chris Grayling:** We had two hours from the Prime Minister on Monday on our defence strategy, which is clear. We are investing in defence equipment and giving our armed forces the tools they need for the future, and we will have some exciting new capabilities. We take our responsibility to defend this nation very seriously. It is just sad that the Scottish National party, with its policy on Trident, appears to want to remove one of the most important of our defences.

## Backbench Business

### Airports Commission: Final Report

*[Relevant documents: First Report from the Transport Committee, Session 2013-14, Aviation strategy, HC 78, and Sixth Special Report from the Transport Committee, Session 2013-14, Aviation strategy: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2013-14, HC 596.]*

1.56 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the final report of the Airports Commission.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this debate, and I thank the Members who supported the application and those who are present today. This is an important subject that requires scrutiny before the Government make their decision. I pay tribute to my colleagues from neighbouring constituencies, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park and the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who are assiduous campaigners on the issue of airport expansion.

The Airports Commission's report came out in July, after two years and about £20 million. Many UK families were preparing to go on holiday at that time, perhaps using their local UK airport. After two years, like many people, I wanted a report that would look forward and be about our UK aviation needs. Like many people, I was disappointed. The report is filled with ifs and buts, and it is shrouded in fog. Many residents of my constituency—I pay tribute to Teddington action group—have found fault with much of the analysis, and many councils, such as Richmond, Wandsworth, Hillingdon and Windsor and Maidenhead, have found fault with the data.

The report's conclusion in favour of expansion at Heathrow will not serve the UK's aviation needs. To start with, let us look at connectivity. The interim report stated that a third runway at Heathrow would be at maximum capacity by 2050. The final report advises against a fourth runway, so how can that be a long-term option for the UK's aviation needs?

The report shows a decrease in domestic destinations, from seven to four—bad luck for Scotland and Ireland, and not good news for the northern powerhouse. Again, the third runway at Heathrow is not a good option for the UK's long-term aviation needs. The table in the report implies that there may be 12 extra long-haul destinations. However, some analysts say that if we compare the expanded Heathrow of three runways with Heathrow in the summer of 2015, with two runways, we see that the actual increase in long-haul destinations is but one. On the increase by more than 250,000 in flights to and from Heathrow, the report says the slots will be “in the morning and peak evening periods” when residents will be most affected.

On the cost, again, we are shrouded in fog. The independent economic review said: “we counsel caution”. Other analysts talk of “double accounting”. The report mentions aeronautical charges, but the airlines say that

[Dr Tania Mathias]

Heathrow currently charges too much in landing fees and that they would not pay extra charges. There is also a reference to extra costs for surface access. When the Environmental Audit Committee was deliberating with the chief executive, it could not work out exactly how many billions of pounds would be required and whether the taxpayer would pay or Heathrow would pay. Would it be £20 billion or £5 billion? The report refers to a congestion charge, not costed out. It mentions access schemes for the M4 and the M25, again not costed out.

Let us look at the effect on residents. The report says that the noise will be dispersed with an expanded Heathrow. To me, that just means that more people will be affected. It says that the noise impact will be at current levels, yet current levels, for my constituency, are intolerable, as has been demonstrated by Teddington action group. Transport for London says that 1 million people may be affected by an expanded Heathrow. Heathrow is already the worst airport in Europe for noise pollution. With a third runway, it would be worse than Charles de Gaulle, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Madrid. Beyond that, it would be worse than Charles de Gaulle, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Madrid combined. This is not the way forward for the UK's aviation needs.

The report talks of a night flight ban, which the chief executive refuses to accept, even though it is not a total night flight ban but a quasi-night flight ban that does not conform to World Health Organisation standards. In any case, if there can be a night flight ban, or a quasi-night flight ban, with three runways, why cannot my constituents have a night flight ban tonight, with two runways? Already, on average, there are 16 flights between 4.30 am and 6 am—it is intolerable.

The report talks about an authority to liaise with the community. It points out that there is no trust between Heathrow airport and the community now, so why would a third runway increase trust? It mentions a noise levy—would that be borne by the passengers or the airlines?—but my residents are not interested in a noise levy; they are interested in a good night's sleep.

The report talks about air quality, and in this respect there is less fog, because it says that the expansion of Heathrow is

“contingent on...performance on air quality.”

But Heathrow cannot manage air quality with two runways, so how will it manage with three? Why does the report compare the nitrous dioxide levels at Heathrow with those of the worst road in London? Why does it not compare them with the EU levels—the legal levels?

**Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Dr Mathias:** I am coming to the end of my speech.

The report does not include the hypothesis that as we move forward we may not want a hub airport. It does not consider that regional airports might want the competition that an expanded Heathrow would remove. If we are looking for a hub airport, then the Gatwick airport option shows the same economic benefits with less environmental impact. As we all know, the report does not consider a hub airport outwith an urban area—perhaps in an estuary.

Before the Government make a decision, I want them to consider this: Heathrow, with a night flight ban that it will not accept, with the ban on further expansion that the report calls for, and with a problem of environmental impact that it cannot address even with two runways, cannot be the hub it aspires to be. In 2009, the Prime Minister, as Leader of the Opposition, said, “no ifs, no buts, no third runway.” This report is 342 pages of ifs and buts. It is not a solution for the UK's future aviation needs. Before the Government make their decision, I urge them to remember the Prime Minister's promise.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I call Sadiq Khan, with a six-minute limit.

2.6 pm

**Sadiq Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), on securing it.

The first question we need to ask is whether we think there is a need for increased flight capacity in this part of the country. London has been the global economic powerhouse for centuries, built on its openness to people, ideas and trade. My view is that there is a need for increased flight capacity. The Davies commission discussed how that need should be addressed, and it concluded that there should be a new runway at Heathrow. I disagree with the conclusion reached by Davies; I think it is possible to address the need for increased flight capacity without the blight and the additional noise pollution and air quality problems that we have heard about.

Let us remind ourselves of the challenges that we face in London. Last year alone, almost 10,000 Londoners died as a direct result of poor air quality. There are children in parts of London whose lungs are underdeveloped because of the air. A couple of months ago, the UK Supreme Court held that our air was in breach of the EU and UK air quality directive. Our air in London is a killer—it makes people sick, and it is illegal. In those circumstances, I do not see how a new runway at Heathrow addresses the requirement on us to meet the Supreme Court's judgment. Even without building a new runway, I cannot see how Heathrow is addressing that problem now. The hon. Member for Twickenham will know, as will other colleagues, of the challenges posed by surface transport going to and from a Heathrow with two runways, let alone three.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con) *rose*—

**Sadiq Khan:** Of course I give way to the former Transport Minister.

**Sir Simon Burns:** I am very grateful to the former Transport Minister for giving way. Could he please tell me when he changed his mind on Heathrow, given that he was a Transport Minister under a Labour Administration who opted for a third runway at Heathrow, and given that he fought the 2010 general election on a pledge that a Labour Government would build a third runway at Heathrow?

**Sadiq Khan:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that in 2010, after we lost that general election, the then Government decided to have the report from Davies, and it came out with three recommendations. I have listened to the points made by Davies, but I have also read the Supreme Court judgment. I have met some of the teachers who cannot teach during the daytime because of the noise in the classrooms in west London, which my hon. Friends will talk about. I have met those who took the case to the Supreme Court, some of the children who are struggling, and some of those in London who are suffering from ill health. However, I accept that we face a challenge, and that we need to address the need for increased flight capacity in this part of the country.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the need for increased flight capacity could be met in large part by greater use of regional airports, such as the brilliant airport in Birmingham, which contributes £1 billion to the UK's economy, is within a two-hour drive for 35 million people, and will be much easier to get to when we build High Speed 2?

**Sadiq Khan:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point about the need to invest in and support regional airports. Birmingham is our second city and we should support it, but I am worried that the report, if its recommendations are accepted, will not allow that to happen. Flight capacity in this part of the country could also be increased through a new runway at Gatwick airport. That would result in not only jobs, which that part of the country is always in need of, and growth, but, just as importantly, more competition for Heathrow airport. We want a better Heathrow airport, not a bigger one.

**Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)  
*rose—*

**Sadiq Khan:** This is the last time I will give way, because I need to make progress.

**Mark Field:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Like him, I am a central London MP, and a third runway would definitely affect my constituents, particularly with regard to air quality. I very much agree with them on that. However, why does he think the Davies commission was so categorical in its conclusion that it did not take the view that there should be a third runway at Gatwick? It was very clear about that. I personally would have preferred that, but that is not what the independent commission has suggested.

**Sadiq Khan:** Davies ruled out the proposed fantasy estuary airport on an island, because it is nonsense, but he did not rule out a new runway at Gatwick. It is important for us to understand the benefits of a new runway at Gatwick airport.

**Dr Mathias:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sadiq Khan:** As it is the hon. Lady, I will give way, but I will then need to make progress.

**Dr Mathias:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the data used for Gatwick by the report are now known to be inaccurate?

**Sadiq Khan:** That is the point I was going to make, so I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. On connectivity, the figures for Gatwick versus Heathrow—based on accurate data—are very similar. On economic benefits, the net present value of Gatwick is £10.9 billion, while the figure for Heathrow is £11.8 billion. The cost of expanding Gatwick is far cheaper, at £7.8 billion versus £15.6 billion. Gatwick requires far less public subsidy than Heathrow airport. On deliverability, there would be no need to build a tunnel under the M25, destroy villages or relocate significant waste and associated waste plants. Noise is also an important concern for not only the hon. Lady, but hon. Members in neighbouring seats. The expansion of Gatwick would affect far fewer people than a new runway at Heathrow airport. Gatwick does not breach, and never has breached, any air quality limits, but Heathrow airport currently breaches both UK and EU air limits. It is difficult to understand how the UK could meet the Supreme Court judgment with a new runway at Heathrow airport.

This is an important debate about an important issue. I am passionately in favour of increased air capacity in this part of the country, because it will lead to more jobs and growth. Anybody who wants more jobs and growth in London, and who wants Heathrow to have better competition, cannot be against increased flight capacity in this part of the country. Anybody who rules out a new runway at both Heathrow and Gatwick is playing hard and loose with jobs in London, and with London in general.

**Ian Austin:** I want to challenge the notion that everything has to be in London and the south-east. Why does increased capacity have to be at either Gatwick or Heathrow? As I have said, why not make greater use of regional airports? Why do all the extra jobs need to be in London and the south-east when people cannot afford to buy a house there? Let us have proper devolution to the rest of the country. Let us support the regional economies and the regional airports.

**Sadiq Khan:** I disagree with my hon. Friend, because he implies that this is a zero-sum game. If London and the south-east do well, that will not happen at the expense of Birmingham. Birmingham is better than that. Both Birmingham and the south-east can do well.

Opposing airport expansion in the south-east full stop is damaging to jobs and business and misses a huge opportunity. I support those hon. Members who are against a new runway at Heathrow and who are in favour of a new runway at Gatwick airport.

2.15 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), not only on having secured this debate, together with her colleagues, but on the manner in which she presented her case, although I have to say that I profoundly disagree with it. May I also apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend for the fact that I cannot be here at 5 o'clock for the wind-ups? I have an unavoidable commitment, but I shall stay to listen to as much of the debate as possible.

My position is perfectly clear: I am an aviator and therefore believe it is impossible to have too many runways. I am fully supportive of a third runway at

[*Sir Gerald Howarth*]

Heathrow, although personally I prefer my great friend Jock Lowe's proposal of a Heathrow hub, with a sequential runway to the west of 27/09. That would have knocked down fewer houses and been less intrusive, and it would also have been rather novel. I am also strongly supportive of a second runway at Gatwick. It was complete nonsense when that was ruled out for 40 years in 1979. We should not constrain future generations in the same way.

The commission has found that Heathrow is massively important. Paragraph 2.46 states that

"Heathrow's long-haul network over-shadows that of any other UK airport, with 84% of scheduled long-haul flights at London airports and 60% of scheduled long-haul destinations not being available anywhere else in the London airport system."

There we have it, in one sentence—the key importance of Heathrow and why we should back it. Back Heathrow says that Heathrow provides 78% of long-haul flights, as well as 25% by value of our exports. It is hugely important.

In paragraph 3.21, the commission reports on the negative impact that a decision not to proceed with the third runway would have on not just the local economy, but the wider economy. It estimates that over a 60-year period—which is a long time, I accept—the costs could amount to £21 billion for users and providers of airport infrastructure and £30 billion to £45 billion for the wider economy. One does not need to query those figures; we simply need to recognise that they are substantial and reflect the importance of Heathrow.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Heathrow is absolutely vital to areas such as mine? More than 700 companies are headquartered in the Buckinghamshire region because of its proximity to Heathrow. Frankly, my constituents would rather see the expansion of Heathrow, which would benefit them economically, than the building of HS2, which does nothing for the economy in Buckinghamshire.

**Sir Gerald Howarth**: I am delighted to support my right hon. Friend's argument about the importance of Heathrow, but I must disappoint her by saying that I am also in favour of HS2. I will explain why in a moment.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con)  
*rose—*

**Sir Gerald Howarth**: Given that my hon. Friend took my job at the Ministry of Defence, I suppose I am bound to give way to him.

**Dr Murrison**: On the subject of who benefits, has my hon. Friend studied with interest, as I have, the awful maps on pages 163 and 164 of the Davies report? They show very clearly that, on economic benefit, if we have to choose between Heathrow and Gatwick, the decision is something of a no-brainer: it has to be Heathrow. The west midlands, Wales and the west country will benefit from Heathrow, while the south-east will predominantly benefit from Gatwick. My hon. Friend is a west countryman at heart, so I know he will redouble his support for Heathrow, because if there is to be a choice between the two, that is a no-brainer.

**Sir Gerald Howarth**: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. There is no doubt that the location of Heathrow was chosen in the first instance because it was the most propitious place to maximise the value of placing an airport near London.

As someone who flew out of Heathrow within 12 months of its opening, I have used Heathrow all my life. There is no doubt that the airport was groundbreaking at the time it was created. It was the first airport in the world to have two parallel runways. In fact, it had six, but the number is now down to two because aircraft are capable of dealing with crosswinds in a way they were not in the 1950s, when tunnels under the runways were necessary. The airport was a serious innovation, and it is now lagging behind. The commission has said that failure to address the problem will

"have negative impacts on the wider economy through creating barriers to trade, investment, tourism, and adversely affecting employment",

as the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) said. There is an overwhelming economic case.

I recognise that the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham clearly feel somewhat aggrieved. I have to tell her that I was a councillor in Chiswick. I have had a property in Chiswick all my married life, which is 43 years to date—still counting, I hope—and I live about 300 or 400 yards north of the extended centre line of runway 27 right, so I see aeroplanes daily. I must say that if people choose to live in Twickenham, they have to take into account the airport, which was there a long time before they chose to live there.

I am afraid that the same applies to the people of Richmond. Great man though my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) is—I seriously look forward to his succeeding my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) as the next Mayor of London—and though he must do whatever he feels is right, I also have to speak as I find. I find that it is absolutely imperative that we recognise that of the boroughs that have been consulted, the only one where the majority of those responding found against Heathrow was his own borough. Everywhere else, a majority found in favour of continuing Heathrow's importance to the community, and therefore in favour of a third runway.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): The poll that my hon. Friend mentions is the only poll in the world that reveals that most boroughs are in favour of Heathrow expansion. He will not be surprised to hear that it was conducted by Heathrow.

**Sir Gerald Howarth**: My goodness me, it must therefore be very authoritative. I accept the argument that there is an imposition, but, as I have said, those who live there choose to live there, and for many of them, including several of us in the Chamber today, proximity to Heathrow—

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Gerald Howarth**: I will not give way. I gather that the hon. Lady represents me in Chiswick. She is not as good as her predecessor, so I cannot give way.

People know what to expect, and those of us in the House who live close to Heathrow have the benefit of that, as I found the other day when I left my wallet behind on leaving for Heathrow, but returned home and still got through security in time to catch my plane to Edinburgh.

Let me make a local point. I represent Farnborough, which has the most prestigious business airports in the world, run by TAG Farnborough airport. It provides for the business community, and takes a lot of the load off Heathrow and Gatwick. It will continue to do so provided it is not impaired by the Ministry of Defence, which is giving preferential treatment to Northolt, and it should not do at the expense of the private sector.

We are the beneficiaries of the Victorians' vision: they went ahead and built great schemes—this building is one of them—of which we are still the beneficiaries. Since then, we have been subjected to a lack of vision and to paralysis. I saw a map produced by Slough Estates, dated 1935, for an orbital road around London, but it took 50 years. We cannot go on like this. The commission has given us a comprehensive analysis and an answer. We need to get on with it now.

2.24 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), who is also my constituent, but I am afraid I am going to disagree profoundly with you.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: Order. The hon. Lady is not going to disagree with the Chair. She might disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but she will not disagree with the Chair. I am clamping down on this now, because we have been here a long time.

**Ruth Cadbury**: My sincere apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am still getting used to the conventions of this place.

What happened to the Prime Minister's decisive statement—

“No ifs, no buts, no third runway at Heathrow”—

that he made prior to the 2010 election? Six years later, we are on the eve of announcements that may mean the Prime Minister giving the third runway at Heathrow the green light. That decision would be devastating for my constituency, have irreversible implications for London and the UK, and not provide the quick or economically solution to runway capacity that business is seeking. The Heathway runway 3 option is the only one of the three deliverable options in the Airports Commission report that it recommends, and it does so through a flawed economic assessment of its own figures.

Before I go further, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate to take place. For helping me today, I also thank the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise, CHATR—Chiswick Against the Third Runway—as well as West London Friends of the Earth and Hounslow Council.

Heathrow should be better, not bigger. I recognise the significant local and national benefits it brings to the economy now. I oppose expansion because I want no increase in the noise and pollution that the airport already causes, and I want to work with it on reducing those negative impacts.

**Mark Field**: Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ruth Cadbury**: I will continue because I have a lot to cover.

Heathrow Airport Ltd may be winning on the amount spent on PR, but this Parliament has a duty to assess the optimum solution, not be swayed by marketing rhetoric.

**Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): How long does the hon. Lady think we can continue to assess this? The debate has been running for 20 years. How many more years do we need for this endless theological debate? Will there ever be a conclusion to this debate?

**Ruth Cadbury**: There will be a conclusion if the Prime Minister considers the quicker, less costly and less risky option of Gatwick.

Most people who will be impacted by runway 3—those who will be affected by the change in respite periods and those under the new landing path—do not yet know what that impact will be. British Airways no longer supports Heathrow airport runway 3. The chief executive of its parent company has expressed serious concerns about how a third runway would be funded. Mr Walsh has said:

“The infrastructure is not fit for purpose. The price tag is excessive and cannot be justified on any basis. We didn't ask for it and we're not paying for it.”

Business has said time and again that a quick decision is needed. Businesses want to get to and from London, and to and from their markets. Heathrow Airport Ltd is often not top of their agenda.

**Ian Austin**: Businesses also want to get to other parts of the country, not just to London. I do not understand why people in the south-east do not understand that Gatwick is much more difficult to get to than a brilliant regional airport such as Birmingham, as I said earlier. It is within a two-hour drive for 35 million people in this country. Why can we not use the spare capacity at Birmingham? With HS2, it is within 40 minutes of London, and could in effect become Heathrow's third runway. Why do we not do that?

**Ruth Cadbury**: I thank my hon. Friend. There are other solutions, but I am concentrating on the subject of the debate, the Airports Commission, which recommended Gatwick as one of its three options for an additional runway in London and the south-east.

For residents, expansion at Heathrow will mean 40% more flights overhead; 50% more of London and the south-east in a high-noise area, such as the 57 dB Leq area; more air pollution; less respite for those areas that currently benefit from it; more traffic congestion; little chance of getting or keeping a cap on night flights; and yet more pressure for yet further expansion—in other words, the possibility of a fourth runway. The announcement of a third runway will start a long, drawn-out process. Legal challenge is a real possibility. This will not be a quick process.

I want to cover what Heathrow, with two runways, means to my constituents now. My constituency lies between Heathrow and central London, beneath the landing paths of planes approaching over London. Heathrow is with us: it has been with us for almost

[Ruth Cadbury]

70 years and it is part of our daily lives. It provides jobs and economic stimulus for a wide area of west London and the Thames valley, but it also brings noise, traffic congestion and air pollution. I have never advocated that it be closed or reduced in capacity, and I do not like being accused of that. A real threat to Heathrow's future would be the Mayor of London's proposal for a Thames estuary airport.

When Heathrow airport is operating in a westerly direction, which is 70% of the time, planes approach the airport directly overhead every 60 to 90 seconds for 17 hours each day. They are locked into their final approach, so there is no variation for the homes, schools and workplaces that are directly underneath those planes. More than half my constituents live within the 57 dB noise contour and the rest of my constituents will do so if a third runway goes ahead. The noise starts at 4.15 every morning with, on average, 16 flights before 6 am. The noise is then continuous for an hour and, from 7 am till 3 pm, those under the approach of one runway get continuous noise before the planes switch to the other runway until the airport finally closes down, so long as the weather is not bad, at 11.30 pm.

It is not just my constituents who are affected; more than 700,000 people in London and the south-east are affected every single day. More people are affected by aircraft noise near Heathrow than at any other major European airport.

For my constituency, a third runway would mean a 40% increase in flights. It would also include the rest of the constituency in the high-noise area, allowing it to share the joy of continuous overflying for eight to 10 hours a day. Air quality, which is already in breach of EU limits, would be worse, as would traffic congestion and pressure on housing, jobs and public services.

For some, a third runway would mean the loss of their home. Last night I met Armelle, who has been a resident of Harmondsworth village for 46 years. Ninety minutes after the Davies commission report was published, she and her husband received a hand-delivered letter from the chief executive of Heathrow Airport Ltd, telling them about the arrangements to be made for buying their home at a price that would not buy a flat in most of west London. Her husband fell ill as a result of the pressure that letter caused and, within eight weeks, he sadly passed away. Armelle's MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), is a Front Bencher and so is unable to speak in this debate, so she asked me to make the House aware that a community of more than 10,000 people and 4,000 homes will have to leave if Heathrow expands. She said, "You cannot replace a community."

The main reasons to oppose expansion are noise, air quality, a business case that does not stack up and flaws in the economic arguments in the Davies commission report. In conclusion, Heathrow runway 3 is the most costly, most complex and highest risk of the three proposed schemes in the Airports Commission report. Furthermore, it is predicated on conditions that the airport operator is not prepared to concede.

2.32 pm

**Sir Alan Haselhurst** (Saffron Walden) (Con): I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate. It is our first opportunity to discuss the Davies commission and it is giving us an early view of how colleagues will be disobliging to each other in the course of deploying their arguments.

My interest in this matter goes back a long way, as the *Official Report* will bear witness. I often think that when I die, the word "Stansted" will be found engraved on my heart. I must declare that interest, which was formed when I was the hon. Member for Middleton and Prestwich in Greater Manchester. That was at the time of the Roskill report on airports policy. I came to the conclusion that no inland site should be chosen for London's third airport. Indeed, the report did not even recommend Stansted. I saw all the other sites and, as far as I was concerned, none of them was correct.

My stance was reinforced when BAA, the statutory authority at the time, concluded the infamous pact with West Sussex County Council not to have a second runway at Gatwick, the second airport, within 40 years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) said. To my mind, that was the aviation equivalent of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. BAA denied that anything could be done about the Perry Oaks sludge works, which sit to the west of Heathrow. I was told, as though I was a child, that I did not understand—it was too costly, it was technically impossible and so on. Of course, that is where terminal 5 now stands.

The Davies report comes out in favour of a hub airport. I am prepared, on balance, to accept that that is the current need. The report backs Heathrow in support of that concept. It then stops short of following its own logic by ruling out a fourth runway. Most airlines would say, "You can't have a hub airport that is limited to three runways—look at what the competition is doing." Every factor that persuaded Davies to recommend a third runway will recur in time, whether it is connectivity with our provincial airports or the need for more long-haul routes to be established.

The tactic of ruling out a fourth runway is a repeat of what has happened on so many occasions in the past. It is a worthless condition. The infamous letter of Sir John Egan in 1995, when terminal 5 was finally discussed, stated

"we do not want, nor shall we seek, an additional runway."

It stated that they had

"called on the Inspector to recommend that, subject to permission being given for T5, an additional Heathrow runway should be ruled out forever."

When representatives of BAA appeared before the Select Committee on Transport, on which I had the honour to serve in the 1990s, we put it to them time and again that it could be recommended that, in addition to terminal 5, they should have a third runway, but they denied it, denied it and denied it. We cannot believe people when they try to bind the future in that way.

My constituents in Saffron Walden are also familiar with that tactic. After the airports inquiries of 1981 to 1983, Graham Eyre stated:

"There are compelling reasons which are now manifest as to why a second runway at Stansted should not be developed under any circumstances and Government should make an unequivocal declaration of intention that a second main runway will not be built."

He later described a second runway as an “environmental catastrophe”. The Government made that declaration, but within seven years the Government—not a different Government, but the same one—began to water it down. Davies himself has said that in the longer term, he sees no difficulty with a second runway at Stansted. That completely devalues any undertaking that is given.

There are other weaknesses in the Davies report’s support for a third runway at Heathrow, as hon. Members have said. As I read the report, the impression grew on me that every consideration was being bent towards a recommendation on which the commission had already decided. Air quality has been mentioned. Will the cost of surface transport be achieved? Will there really be many regional airport connections and will they last for very long? I question the practicality of ruling out early arrivals at the so-called hub airport because of the effect that that will have on connectivity, if it is to be an effective airport in the future. I question how many new long-haul routes will be created. The accumulation of doubts could affect the timing and financing of any third runway at Heathrow.

Some people say that competition between airports is unrealistic. I am not sure that I agree. There is no doubt at all that Gatwick and Stansted have become much better places from which to operate under their new owners. However, the House will understand that it would be inconsistent with the view I formed a long time ago if I now accepted that north-west Essex was the most admirable site for a four-runway airport. I am sorry if this view disappoints the unlikely duo of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and Lord Sugar.

I still believe that the Government of 1970 were right and that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip is right in saying that the correct long-term answer lies in the estuary. To have a world-class airport for a world-class city, London needs to start again. The British have built excellent airports in other parts of the world, but not here. We should think in bigger terms and we should also think of the northern powerhouse.

2.39 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Before I start, I must apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the Members in the Chamber because, like the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), I will not be present for the summing up due to a constituency engagement. In my case, it is an event that was postponed due to the Paris atrocities. I hope that that is okay with everyone present.

An additional runway in the south-east of England might not be at the top of my constituents’ priorities if one uses my postbag or inbox as measuring tools, but I have certainly received more correspondence on this issue than in support of military action in Syria. Some of that correspondence states that London and the south-east has had quite enough infrastructure investment, and that more effort should be made to attract direct flights to the countries and regions, and away from London. I have some sympathy with that argument, but I am afraid we must deal with the reality of a straight choice between Heathrow or Gatwick.

The SNP is currently neutral on this matter, but it and the Scottish Government have strong views about the benefits to Scotland of improved connectivity with

London and the rest of the world through better hub capacity. Scotland is located on the periphery of Europe, and as such travelling by air is not a luxury but an essential element of business and family life. Scotland’s ability to maintain and increase its global competitiveness is dependent on air links with established and emerging markets. Sadly, we are reliant on other European hubs—including London—for much of that connectivity. Recent research by the Civil Aviation Authority confirmed the extent to which Scotland is dependent on hub airports, with 40% of international and 70% of long-haul passengers reaching their final destination indirectly.

Glasgow airport in my constituency is west Scotland’s primary link to economic markets and therefore pivotal to its future success. It sustains more than 7,000 jobs and contributes almost £200 million to the national economy. It was used by more than 7.7 million passengers in 2014, and is currently UK airport of the year. Glasgow—along with Aberdeen and Inverness airports, chambers of commerce in Inverness, Aberdeen and Grampian, Renfrewshire and Glasgow, and CBI Scotland—supports the Heathrow bid, while Edinburgh supports its sister airport, Gatwick. Glasgow airport tells me that it has approximately 30 airlines that serve 110 destinations. The most popular route is the British Airways Glasgow to Heathrow service, which is used by more than 870,000 passengers. Gatwick is also hugely important to Glasgow, with 615,000 passengers using that service across two airlines. However, 49% of passengers flying to Glasgow from Heathrow were transfers and started their journey outwith the UK, while only 26% of passengers from Gatwick were transfers.

In this global age connectivity is vital. Connectivity in the UK is currently dominated by Heathrow, which is the UK’s only hub and offers the greatest number of onward connections and the greatest frequency of feeder services. I am not saying that that should continue to be the case, but put simply, Heathrow serves 75 destinations that cannot be reached from any other UK airport.

To be crystal clear, this decision is as important to Scotland and elsewhere in these islands as it is for London and the south-east. It is still not clear whether the House will vote on this issue, and if so, whether it will be certified as English only. When giving evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, the Leader of the House said:

“If we have a vote on whether to build a runway at Heathrow or at Gatwick within the UK Parliament, it will be carried only with the wish of the UK Parliament. But whether there is an England-only vote element to it will depend entirely on the nature of the vote, the nature of the vehicle. If it is simply a vote in principle and it is not on legislation, then it would not be covered by these procedures anyway...If there was a piece of legislation that is about the detailed planning of a new airport, it will be for the Speaker to decide whether it is an England only motion or not.”

The possibility of Scots MPs not having full voting rights on a matter of such importance met with incredulity in Scotland, with Doug Maclean—an aviation consultant with DKM Aviation Partners—saying that that would be “absolutely preposterous”. He stated:

“It’s like saying only Scottish MPs should have the vote on Trident renewal because it’s based in Scotland. It’s absurd. Heathrow is there as a national UK asset. Its whole structure is about being a major hub and connecting the UK to as many international routes as possible...it’s had to squeeze out the less popular or profitable routes like a lot of the Scottish and English regional

[Gavin Newlands]

airports. What's being proposed at Heathrow, and separately by Gatwick, is the ability to have access slots at the airports on a greater basis. To say it's English only is complete nonsense."

I hope that I have made two things abundantly clear. First, the connectivity that an additional runway would provide is vital to Scotland and its future growth potential. Secondly, if the House is asked to make a decision on that issue, it should not be certified as English-only. Members from all constituent and "equal" parts of the Union should be allowed full voting rights on such an important issue.

2.43 pm

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) on her speech and on promoting me to a right hon. Member. Giving the looming decision on Heathrow, that has never been less likely, but I thank her all the same.

Big infrastructure is always disruptive. That is why we are having this debate, because whenever a big infrastructure project is discussed, it always causes pain. Often, however, the gain justifies that pain. Clearly that is the view of those who support Heathrow expansion, but I implore them to look properly at the costs and benefits of this project before taking a view, because I think the figures speak for themselves.

Let me revisit some of the cost—much of it has already been discussed, so I will be brief. Noise is the principal concern. Heathrow is already Europe's biggest noise polluter by far—720,000 people are already affected, and a third runway would increase flights from 480,000 to around 740,000 a year and affect well over 1 million people. In addition, people would lose half the respite periods, which they treasure, because those would be cut from eight hours to four hours.

When Heathrow says that fewer people will be impacted by noise under an expanded airport with a third runway, that merely tells us that Heathrow as a company is so used to getting its way with the Government that it no longer feels the need even to appear reasonable. The Government have admitted—we might get clarity on this later in the debate—that they have not analysed the impact of noise on residents if Heathrow expands. I do not believe that they have even seen the proposed flight paths, but perhaps the Minister will clarify that point later in the debate.

Then there is pollution. With only two runways, air pollution around Heathrow already massively exceeds existing legal limits. A third runway would see 75 million more people using the airport and travelling to and from it—Transport for London believes that an extra runway would add 25 million more lorry and car journeys each year. Nobody in the world believes that Heathrow expansion can be reconciled with any of the aspirations, legal or otherwise, on air quality—nobody except Heathrow that is, which tells us that a third runway would take place with a zero increase in car movements. It is hard even to know how to respond to that assertion.

Howard Davies has begun to nuance his position on air quality on the back of the Volkswagen scandal, because the data on which he based his assumptions have been revealed to be entirely fraudulent. A few days ago he said to a Committee of MPs, including me:

"I do think the Government will need to satisfy itself on this particular point, clearly some things have moved on. The Government will need to satisfy itself that this can be safely done."

The financial cost has already been mentioned, and we have an unlikely new ally in this campaign in the form of Willie Walsh, the head of BA. He described the proposed costs as "outrageous", and said that they make the project impossible and undeliverable. If we consider surface transport costs alone, he is obviously right. How do we accommodate 25 million extra road passenger journeys per year? The Airports Commission puts the cost at £6 billion, while Heathrow puts it at £1 billion. Transport for London has put that cost at around £20 billion—it goes on, and on.

That is just some of the downside, and it is big. People might consider accepting that downside if the economic case was utterly overwhelming, but what is amazing about the Howard Davies report is that it makes the economic case against Heathrow expansion for us. There is a giant gap between the report and the conclusion it reaches. It is as if Howard Davies began with a conclusion, spent £20 million and three years—or however long it took—cobbling together analysis, data and information, and then stuck the same conclusion on the end of the report.

In the report Howard Davies tells us that in the most optimistic scenario, an expanded Heathrow would give us just 12 additional international routes. Even worse, much of the additional activity—if not all of it—would be at the expense of neighbouring airports such as Stansted and Gatwick. In other words, we would not be creating new activity; we would be centralising existing activity. We would be recreating the old monopoly—a giant, foreign-owned, subsidised monopoly on the edge of our city. It is a pitifully small upside, even more so when compared with the colossal dose of pain that Heathrow expansion encompasses.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Gentleman, including on the Airport Commission report. We are where we are, however, and a choice has to be made. It is a binary choice the Government will make within, we are told, the next three or four weeks. Is he going further than his previous position and does he support the second runway at Gatwick, the only credible other option on the table?

**Zac Goldsmith:** I noticed the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) briefing the hon. Gentleman with that question a few moments ago. I will answer that point, but I have to say that the position of the right hon. Member for Tooting on this issue seems to ebb and flow with the weather. He seems to say one thing to one audience and another thing to another audience. His position on Heathrow is about as authentic as Donald Trump's hair, and the same applies to his position on almost every issue on which he has opined in the past few months. Nevertheless, I will answer the question.

The alternative to monopoly, which is what is proposed as the first choice of the Howard Davies commission, is competition. We know competition works. We only have to look at Gatwick to know that competition works: it has become a better airport. It has opened up routes to places we were told it would not be able to open routes up to, including Hanoi, Jakarta and two routes to China. Competition is the answer.

Despite coming down in favour of monopoly, even Howard Davies has acknowledged that the third runway would stifle growth at the other airports. He has said:

“a competing airport system is right for London”.

So how do we encourage that? We invest in transport links to, from and between the three main airports in London. If and when—as is likely—we have a capacity problem, we expand. We do not expand at Heathrow, however; we expand at a place in such a way that maximises rather than suffocates competition. That has always been my position: today, as it has been in any number of articles, interviews and comments. I have always come down in favour of competition, because it is the obvious answer.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. We have a problem with the clock. I calculate that the hon. Gentleman has one minute and 50 seconds left, including the intervention he is about to take.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP):** Having sat on the Environmental Audit Committee and read about and listened to the concerns of a variety of community organisations in relation to the expansion of Heathrow, I do not think any questions have actually been answered. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that even the air monitoring system at Heathrow is absolutely and totally inadequate?

**Zac Goldsmith:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. For the record, I agree with the position he has expressed privately, and which his colleague the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) expressed, which is that this is an issue for the Scottish National party. This is a piece of national infrastructure and it requires the consent of the whole country.

Some colleagues believe we need a giant mega-hub. Some colleagues are inclined to back Heathrow expansion because they think an inadequate third runway would inevitably give way to a fourth runway. I think people are willing to agree with this halfway route on the basis that we will end up with a mega-hub of four runways. They should bear in mind, however, what NATS told the Airports Commission and has repeated subsequently: it would veto, as much as it is able to do, the construction of a fourth runway on the basis that our west London skies are too crowded. It does not believe it would be possible to keep our skies safe with a fourth runway. I therefore ask anyone inclined to back Heathrow expansion in the hope that it leads to a fourth runway to think again. Our skies in that particular part of the region simply could not accommodate that.

Regardless of the Government’s decision—whenever it is made; we assume that it will be before Christmas—I personally do not believe Heathrow expansion will happen. I do not think the Government’s decision will make the slightest bit of difference, other than perhaps to delay a discussion that has already been going on for far too long. Heathrow expansion is not politically deliverable and I do not think it is legally deliverable, either. MPs, councillors and countless residents across the very large flightpath will make that point for as long as they need to.

2.52 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow some excellent speeches, particularly by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury). The two candidates for the mayoralty of London agreed with each other, which is good. Like them, I am opposed to a third runway at Heathrow. Indeed, I am not personally convinced there is a case for a new runway in the south-east at all. I have suggestions for a more sensible way forward.

We should maximise the use of existing capacity. One way to do that is by realising that we have a new generation of aircraft coming in with higher payload capacity and shorter take-off and landing requirements, so there will be more take-offs and landings per hour. They are composite-bodied aircraft, such as the Boeing Dreamliner, and are more fuel-efficient, quieter and less polluting. There is more capacity at Stanstead that should be maximised. In my town of Luton, of course, there is London Luton airport, which is due to expand its capacity from 10 million to nearly 20 million passengers a year. That is to be welcomed. There is now serious talk of a fixed-rail transit link between the rail station and the airport. I am meeting the airport director tomorrow to discuss these matters. London Luton airport can make a contribution.

London Luton airport could also become a satellite for Heathrow if there were a fast rail link between Luton Airport Parkway station and Heathrow. This could be done by using the curve going through Cricklewood to get on to the west coast main line. That would be the way forward; there could be a hub-satellite relationship. There is also a major case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) said, for making greater use of regional airports. One in particular has been mentioned: Birmingham. Birmingham will not be effective at serving London, being a two-hour drive away, but there are ways of dealing with that problem that I have spoken about on previous occasions.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** The hon. Gentleman touches on Birmingham airport. Is he aware that HS2, which is not favoured by every hon. Member, will apparently make the journey between Birmingham airport and central London in 36 minutes? It takes rather longer than that from Stansted and, possibly, from Luton.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I have a better suggestion—I am not a supporter of HS2. Let us electrify and upgrade the Birmingham Snow Hill to London line, going through Banbury, linking it directly to Crossrail, so that it is possible to get from the business district of Birmingham centre right through to Canary Wharf, if necessary, and directly to Heathrow. That could be linked directly to Birmingham airport via Leamington Spa. An electrified, one-hour service shuttle between Birmingham airport and Heathrow airport could effectively make both airports satellites and hubs for each other, which would be a tremendous boon, serving central London well. One hour from Birmingham airport to the centre of London on a modified, electrified 125 mph service would be a way forward, making HS2 redundant.

That is my major suggestion. There is also a possibility of other developments in other airports. Going further north, we could, with my suggestion of electrifying the

[Kelvin Hopkins]

line, even provide direct electric services from Manchester airport to London, as long as we upgrade the Birmingham Snow Hill line through to Heathrow, the City and Canary Wharf. That would provide a much more sensible way forward, which would benefit the west midlands and other regions, taking some of the pressure off the south-east in respect of not only air travel, but economic development and housing. Those are my suggestions, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope they are helpful.

2.57 pm

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) and the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on securing this very important debate. I am particularly delighted because, as the Minister with responsibility for aviation when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set up the Davies commission, I know that the opportunity to debate this critically important issue is long overdue.

I am concerned because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) has said, we have been discussing for 50 years the issue of runways and airports in the vicinity of London and beyond, and we have now reached a critical point. All those who have used Heathrow, particularly for long-haul flights, know that it is overcrowded and over capacity. We can see that most easily when flying on long-haul routes in the early morning, with the stacking that goes on around London. That is not healthy for London, and it is not healthy for connectivity and travelling.

The time has come to stop talking and to come up with a viable solution, because it is in our national and economic interest to continue to ensure that the hub airport for western Europe is in Britain. Heaven knows that Heathrow is under immense pressure from Frankfurt, Schiphol, Charles de Gaulle and even possibly from Madrid; they are trying to poach that position away from us. That is not in our economic interest, or in the interests of people who travel out of the UK from Heathrow or Gatwick.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** On my right hon. Friend's point about Heathrow being congested, that is partly because it operates its two runways in alternate mode. If it were not doing so—local people do not want this change—it would get 216 extra slots per day.

**Sir Simon Burns:** I fully appreciate what my right hon. Friend says, but the critical part of his intervention was his comment that local people do not want this change.

The issue of the pressures imposed on Heathrow's operations over many years has been paramount. Some people have suggested that there should be, in effect, a joint hub for the United Kingdom, based on Heathrow and Gatwick. That was tried in the 1980s and the 1990s, and it was a failure, not least because the major airlines wanted the slots at London Heathrow. There is, of course, the alternative of Gatwick, for which some of my hon. Friends have, quite rightly, argued.

The independent Davies report looked in tremendous detail at all the alternatives, including the proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South

Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the Mayor of London, of which, as an Essex Member, I have to say that I was unfortunately not in favour. An independent body has carried out research and analysis, and has come up with conclusions in what I consider to be a formidable document. It will clearly not find favour with some people, particularly in parts of central and south-west London, but I must add one caveat. Given the sheer number of jobs that are dependent on Heathrow as a thriving airport, not simply in London, but in the home counties and beyond, I find it strange that there should be a potential silent majority—that people who work at Heathrow and rely on it for their livelihoods remain silent and do not make what I assume to be their case.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Simon Burns:** I will not, because I have only a short time in which to speak. I think it would be useful to hear more from both sides, but what is most important is for us finally to put to bed this constant bickering and arguing, and to come up with a coherent proposal that we can take forward in order to protect our position as the supplier of the hub airport for western Europe.

I also think—I accept that this is equally controversial and would require all-party support—that we should look again at the planning procedures governing major projects in this country. It is crazy that it takes so long to build a project. In order not to antagonise too many of my hon. Friends, I shall exclude the airport from the equation. Let us take HS2, or terminal 5 at Heathrow, or a few of the other big projects that are beneficial to the economy and that the country badly needs. It is necessary to faff around with all the procedures in order to get from A to B, and then to C, namely the eventual opening and operation of whatever the project may be. That is wrong, and we need to reform those procedures. We should not cut away people's right to object and have their concerns expressed, but we should ensure that the procedures cannot be used to gerrymander the process, and to delay and delay and delay.

For what it is worth—I am approaching the final seconds of my speech; I will survive alive!—from a purely personal point of view, I think that Heathrow has a compelling case for expanding to meet our capacity problems and to ensure that we have a thriving and successful aviation industry.

3.4 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Let me begin by reflecting, very briefly, the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), not just because he is unable to take part in the debate by virtue of his position in the shadow Cabinet, but because he has been the foremost opponent of Heathrow expansion for many years. He says:

“At the southern tip of my constituency is an 11th century village. Harmondsworth. It contains the oldest tithe barn in England. It has an ancient church and two vintage pubs. But it is also home to thousands of people; to a settled community. But many of these homes and buildings which have stood for a thousand years will be demolished if a third runway is built at Heathrow. Heathrow airport will require 783 properties in Harmondsworth. But it also has said it will buy homes in the neighbouring villages of Sipson and Harlington should people want to move to escape the constant noise of planes landing and

taking off just above their heads. In total, up to 4,000 homes might need to be acquired. There are parts of my constituency where air pollution levels already exceed the EU...limits”,

and while

“a lot of the pollution comes from motor vehicles...I believe that Heathrow is being disingenuous in stating that it can bring in a quarter of a million more planes each year...and expect air pollution levels to fall. Planes will get cleaner but their belief is more an act of faith than one rooted in hard evidence.”

The impact of the third runway will be felt not just in Hayes and Harlington and Hammersmith, of course, but right across London and the home counties. The noise figures are well known. According to the European Commission, more than 725,000 people are impacted by noise from Heathrow—that is 28% of all people disturbed by aircraft noise across Europe. Heathrow is stretching credibility to claim that the number of people affected by noise will fall when 250,000 extra planes are using the third runway.

The economics of a third runway are equally questionable. The Airports Commission could not make up its mind on the figures, but it chose to highlight the fact that the third runway would benefit UK plc to the tune of £147 billion over 60 years, but its own advisers said there were difficulties with the model used to get that figure. Using traditional, tested modelling methods, it was found that a third runway would bring benefits of £69 billion over 60 years, but if the costs of the disbenefits, such as noise and emissions, and of delivering the third runway are included, the economic benefits fall to £11.8 billion over 60 years. Given that significant social and economic cost, as well as the damage to the climate, my plea—and, I am sure, that of my hon. Friend—is that the Government not be swayed by advertising slogans and self-interested voices but recognise that the UK's economy is not dependent on this destructive third runway at Heathrow.

The time for talking is now over. As recently as this Monday in the other place, we were promised that the Government would make an announcement before Christmas about Heathrow and Gatwick, and I am sure the Minister will confirm that. I support the Gatwick option. We have to make that choice. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who is no longer in his place, gave a furtive answer to my question. I think his bid for high office has made him less frank than he was. We have to back Gatwick, because it is the only other choice, but it is also necessary as a driver of the south-west economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) earlier pleaded the case for Birmingham. When HS2 is built, it will be quicker for people in the north of my constituency to get to Birmingham airport than Heathrow on the Piccadilly line. There are other viable options to a third runway at Heathrow.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** HS2 will stop at Euston, which is nowhere near Heathrow. My scheme would provide for a direct rail link from Birmingham airport to Heathrow on a one-hour service. It would effectively make Birmingham and Heathrow partner airports and take a lot of the pressure off Heathrow.

**Andy Slaughter:** Old Oak Common station in my constituency would be the major interchange, making it 31 minutes from Birmingham airport, so I would welcome that scheme.

Heathrow has ruled the roost for too long. Of course, it could keep Stansted and Gatwick when it owned those airports. It also seemed to mesmerise successive Governments. It was only when my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) became leader of the Labour party that our party's policy changed. We hoped that when the Prime Minister said, “no ifs, no buts, no third runway”, that Conservative party policy had changed as well. Unfortunately, I do not believe it was ever really the case, and I believe the commission was set up on a false prospectus. One only has to look at the change in the terms of reference from “whether” we should have expansion to “where” it should be. As has already been said, the inevitable conclusion is that the decision was deliberately delayed until after the election.

I declare an interest. A third runway, as proposed, would directly affect Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush and would subject communities in that area to sustained aircraft noise for the first time. The effect would be dramatic across the whole of west London. A third runway is also unnecessary. I would like to praise the work of Hammersmith and Fulham council in opposing the proposal over many years. I myself have been involved in those campaigns for more than 30 years.

I also praise the council for setting up an independent residents commission, chaired by the former senior civil servant Christina Smyth, which took evidence from all parties and came to the following conclusions. It said that, yes, if Heathrow were chosen we would enjoy some

“economic benefits by way of inward investment”,

And, yes, there would be an

“increased choice of flights and destinations for residents and visitors using Heathrow.”

That is true, but the report also highlighted the additional flights overhead, the additional noise and traffic congestion, the effects on air quality, the failure to mitigate noise properly, the safety concerns and, above all, the effect on residents' health and quality of life. They are a price that is not worth paying. No other country would think of subjecting 2 million people in the most densely populated part of the country to that intolerable burden. This is insanity, particularly when there is an acceptable alternative. I hope that, when the Government make their decision on this matter, they will finally see sense.

3.11 pm

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Of course there are Members on both sides of the House who have a constituency interest in this matter. So far, we have heard from hon. Members who have constituency concerns about the expansion of Heathrow. I, too, have constituency concerns, but they relate to the expansion of Gatwick and many of them sound similar to the issues about Heathrow raised by several of my hon. Friends and others. However, all those concerns must be beside the point. We should all agree that we need to take this decision in the national interest, for reasons that were well described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns).

At the risk of sounding like Basil Fawlty, I have to ask, “What is the point?” What is the point of setting up an Airports Commission at vast cost to seek expert advice and provide the right solution if that preferred

[Nick Herbert]

option is simply to be swept aside? It would be worse still if it were to be swept aside for narrow political reasons. I also challenge the suggestion that the Airports Commission offered the Government three equal options regarding which airport should be developed. I listened with some alarm as the Secretary of State for Transport told the “Today” programme on 30 October that the Davies report “gave us three options” before conceding that Heathrow was the preferred option. No reading of the Airports Commission report could possibly lead to any conclusion other than that Heathrow was the unequivocal recommendation of the commission.

Davies said that Heathrow was the “best answer” and that it presented the “strongest case”. Yes, Davies said that Gatwick was “plausible”, but he then went on to explain why Gatwick did not offer the same benefits as Heathrow. Those benefits include connectivity. Gatwick lies to the south of London and is not connected to the transport network in the same way as Heathrow is. The rail link to Gatwick is already a joke. It is over-subscribed and it is of course not going to be connected to HS2. Davies also calculated that the economic benefits of choosing Heathrow were considerably greater than those for Gatwick. He identified up to £147 billion in net present value of economic benefit in the increase to GDP from choosing Heathrow, compared with £89 billion of economic benefit from choosing Gatwick. That is a considerable difference.

Thirdly, and, in a sense, most significantly, Davies pointed out that Gatwick could not offer the connectivity of Heathrow. That goes to the heart of the matter: we need a single hub airport, and that is what almost all the airlines are saying. The great danger now would be to produce a solution that does not deliver that hub and to watch what happens to London as a consequence were we then to lose business to our international competitors. New York has two airports, and where is the hub on the east coast of the United States? It is O’Hare, in Chicago, a far bigger airport than there is in New York, offering far more connectivity, and New York loses out as a consequence. Tokyo has two airports, but where is the new hub and where is the new business going in the far east? It is going not to Tokyo, but to Seoul, which has a hub airport. Although competition has of course been advantageous and the break-up of the monopolistic ownership of airports has delivered benefits to passengers in the form of an improved passenger experience, the idea that competition would be a good thing and somehow we could run two hub airports, when all the experience has told us that that is what the airlines do not want to do and that splitting business between Heathrow and Gatwick was such a disaster for British Airways, is one for the birds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) said that Gatwick offers, for instance, flights to Jakarta, but Garuda has just announced that it is going to leave Gatwick and go back to Heathrow, because Heathrow offers it better connectivity with a direct flight to Jakarta. We would be making a serious mistake, on the basis of the worst kind of short-term decision making, if we ignored the unequivocal recommendation of this report.

In 1974, the Labour Government cancelled the channel tunnel proposed then by a Conservative Government and cancelled the Maplin Sands airport proposal, and

we are still paying the price. The channel tunnel link was built decades later and the rail link was then built way behind that of the French, and we still do not have a hub airport. Lord Adonis, now to be chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission, described those as “stupid, short-termist decisions”. We have a clear recommendation from the Airports Commission, the evidence is clear, the Government set up the report and now is not the time to run away from it.

3.17 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Heathrow has been in the background for me for 43 years. I was a pupil at Montpelier primary school, just north of Ealing Broadway, and when someone was doing a reading in assembly, they would have to stop as the teacher told them to hang on while Concorde or whatever it was flew past, after which they could continue. I now live in south Ealing, which is even more directly under the flight path, so I notice when the switchover happens. People I went to school with had parents with jobs at Heathrow and adults I know now have jobs there. It is a significant local employer of vital strategic importance to the whole of west London. I have good relationships with it as an employer: I went back to that primary school recently on an engineering challenge with people from the airport; I have been up the control tower as a candidate; and I recognise its figures even though the figures available are slightly different depending on whose one chooses. A tri-borough study carried out by Ealing, Slough and Hounslow talked about 70,000 jobs, whereas Heathrow gives figures of 76,000 direct jobs and 40,000 indirect jobs. That is not to be sniffed at. I also used the airport last week as a passenger, and I like the fact that I can directly get a Piccadilly line train to it in 20 minutes.

Despite all that, and the fantastical figures that Heathrow promises will come with expansion, I cannot support expansion at this time, because it is in the wrong place. If we were starting from scratch, we would not build London’s main hub airport in a densely populated urban area, bringing a raft of problems such as noise, air pollution and traffic congestion impacts. Schiphol, the main European hub, is not in a comparable destination; it was built over fields.

Those impacts of Heathrow are already high, as the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) pointed out, so how is an extra runway going to solve that situation? Air pollution and traffic gridlock are much worse than ever before. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) mentioned villages, and Harmondsworth and places in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) would be bulldozed in any expansion—we are talking about thousands of homes.

In expanding Heathrow, there are more snakes than ladders. If we were to do a SWOT analysis, the environmental threats—I am talking about air quality, noise pollution and carbon emissions, which is the biggest threat of our time—far outweigh those in the rather spurious claims made by Heathrow. We know that Heathrow already breaches the legal limits on air quality, and that there is insufficient reassurance in this report to address that.

Conversely, Gatwick, an option which is still on the table according to Davies, has never broken legal air quality limits, and would remain within them even with

an extra runway. I think the figures are that 18,000 people would be newly affected by expansion at Gatwick, but 320,000 people would be affected by Heathrow—17 times more.

We are living at a time when every pound of public expenditure should be justified. To expand Gatwick would cost the Treasury pretty much nothing, whereas Heathrow will need a £20 billion taxpayer subsidy. Willie Walsh has also said that expansion at Heathrow is unjustifiable in terms of costs. We constantly hear that Heathrow is at capacity, but Gatwick achieved 40 million passengers last year. The Airports Commission report said that that would not be achieved until 2024, which shows how flawed its analysis is. Clearly, Gatwick is crying out for expansion.

Yesterday evening, I was at a public meeting at St Michael's church in the much-mentioned area of Chiswick. There were 200 people there—the organisers said that it was 300, so perhaps it was a median between the two—and they were unanimous in their opposition to a third runway at Heathrow. We have seen flash mobs. I think that there was one even this morning at Terminal 2, which showed the strength of feeling against the expansion.

In my maiden speech, I said that I wanted to be a voice for the suburbs. Bedford Park, which is said to be the world's first garden suburb, was initially marketed as the world's most healthy place. The Bedford Park Society believes that an expansion to Heathrow would make a mockery of that.

Regional expansion is another possibility. We could even think beyond our reliance on planes. The meetings that we all have could be done by telephone conferencing. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) says that there is an excellent airport in Bristol that could be expanded. Stansted is also echoing empty when compared with both Gatwick and Heathrow. Extra capacity at Manchester airport would fit the northern powerhouse strategy of which we hear so much.

To say that the Government's position on this report is long awaited is an understatement. This matter has been talked about for a long time. I am talking about way, way back in the mists of time. I became a candidate in 2012, but the discussions go back nearly 20 years. The ball is in the Government's court. The right decision must be made for west London, because the matter cannot be pushed into the long grass any longer.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Let me refer to Bedford Park, which I used to represent as a Conservative councillor. May I put it to the hon. Lady that all those people who live there—and it is a pretty affluent area—not only knew that Heathrow was there when they moved there, but, given the nature of their occupations, probably benefit very substantially from the close proximity of Heathrow to where they live?

**Dr Huq:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It depends on when they moved there. There were people at the meeting yesterday who said that when they moved there, Heathrow was only a glimmer of what it is now. Certainly, there were not five terminals. I am not saying that we should raze Heathrow to the ground. I recognise its strategic importance to west London. I like the fact that it is very near me, but

London is big enough—its population is heading towards 10 million—to be a dual hub city. Many cities in America have dual hubs. Why can we not have the same, with the two destinations of Gatwick and Heathrow—those are the two airports mentioned in the report? It is completely possible. We could even consider regional alternatives. After all, there are places other than London in this country.

3.24 pm

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Funnily enough, I think that there are some good things in the report by the Airports Commission led by Sir Howard Davies. There are two conclusions that I certainly agree with. First, Britain needs more aviation capacity, as has been said by many of my hon. Friends this afternoon. It is a disgrace, for instance, that Frankfurt airport already serves 100 more destinations than Heathrow. A wretched fact when we are trying to intensify trading co-operation with China is that there are nine cities in China that one cannot reach from the UK but only from airports in continental Europe, which is a serious disadvantage for our business people and for UK plc.

The second point I agree with—agreement that is not universally shared here—is that the only way to achieve that greater connectivity is to have a hub airport. We need the volume of transfer passengers to build the wealth of destinations. The bigger the hub, the more the spokes. Many people in favour of aviation expansion share that analysis.

The only problem with the conclusion that Sir Howard and his team have come to is that that solution does not lie at Heathrow. It cannot provide what my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) rightly called for, which is the long-term solution, because it is so geographically constrained. It is in the wrong place for expansion. The environmental impacts and disbenefits have been well rehearsed this afternoon.

I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) that it is not only existing Londoners who would be affected by the increase in noise, although they might not appreciate planes coming in at 4 o'clock in the morning, which is what would happen if the night flight ban were overturned, as Heathrow wants. According to the Airports Commission, at least 150,000 more Londoners would be affected by the expansion of the airport to a third runway. According to TfL, it would be 300,000 more. That is quite contrary to the Government's expressed policy on aviation expansion.

The second problem is pollution, a point that many hon. Members have already made. The limit values on the Bath Road would be well exceeded, and there would be serious legal challenges that, in the end, would be insuperable. To build this great generator of noise and pollution in west London would cost far more than is currently estimated. TfL estimates the extra transport costs alone to be between £10 billion and £15 billion. That is on top of the £18.6 billion that the commission has estimated for the cost of the third runway itself.

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It has been estimated that £5 billion of public money would be needed for surface transport costs for Heathrow, whereas my preferred option of Gatwick would cost nothing in

[Paul Scully]

that regard. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we expanded Gatwick, we could use that £5 billion elsewhere on much-needed surface transport improvements, such as a Tramlink extension to Sutton?

**Boris Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. As he will have heard from the Chancellor's long-term economic plan for London, the Tramlink extension to Sutton is absolutely part of our programme. My hon. Friend is right. Nobody has factored in the extra costs of the transport. The Government say that they will not pay. The airlines say that they will not pay. I am afraid that the programme is undeliverable.

The final point—this is the answer to the points made by my right hon. Friends the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) and for Arundel and South Downs and others—is that even if a third runway were to be completed, and it could not be done until 2030 by the Airports Commission's own admission, it would be full at the point of completion. It does not answer the exam question in the sense that it does not deliver the extra connectivity that we all want. It does not hook up British business with those extra destinations in China, let alone with Latin America or Africa—those destinations where we are currently losing out. In fact, according to the commission's own figures, the number of long-haul destinations would increase by only seven by 2030, and the number of domestic routes, to answer the points made by some of our Scottish friends, would go down from seven to four.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman mentions connectivity to Scotland, for which I thank him. Does he believe that this should be an English-only matter, or does he share our view that it should be for the United Kingdom Parliament as a whole to decide?

**Boris Johnson:** That is a fair question. The answer is that this is plainly a national issue. Nobody in Scotland would wish to be disadvantaged, and the construction of a third runway at Heathrow being the only option would disadvantage communities not just in Scotland but in other regional cities in the United Kingdom, which would lose connectivity as a result of our taking the wrong route.

As I say, by 2030, Heathrow runway 3 would be full and the pressure would be on. As my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) rightly said in his excellent speech, the pressure would be overwhelming, come 2030, for us to build a fourth runway at Heathrow, which would be a total environmental catastrophe. Where would we be then? What would we have done? We would have blighted the lives of hundreds of thousands of Londoners—not just those who are under the existing flightpath but people in Pimlico, people in New Cross, people in south London, people in Chelsea, people in Shepherd's Bush and people in Hammersmith, who have no idea of the scourge that will be visited upon them by this appalling decision. We would have greatly worsened air quality in the greatest city on earth, in breach of our international obligations. We would have spent colossal sums of taxpayers' money to create a short-term solution that did not address the

problem of Britain's lack of connectivity. Were we to make that mistake, we would find ourselves having to address the same long-term questions that we seem determined to shirk now.

That is why I think it is time to pause, to avoid making a disastrous mistake. There are other, better, more practical solutions on the table. The House knows what they are. I do not have time to rehearse them now, but they are infinitely preferable. They do deliver the long-term solutions, they are environmentally sensitive, they do enhance the competitiveness and the connectivity of this country, and, by the way, they could be achieved at a roughly comparable cost.

The Prime Minister was absolutely right when he said, in 2009, that he wanted to oppose a third runway at Heathrow. He was right to commit us. I voted for that and many people here were elected on that manifesto. It was right—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

3.33 pm

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I will add a little bit of a selfish flavour to the debate, being from Northern Ireland. I note how much the proposed runway will blight certain Members' areas, but I like the point that the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) made about national interest. Please, can we look at this from the perspective of the national interest? We in Northern Ireland need all the routes that we can get, and it seems to us that Heathrow is the best linkage we can have.

Why am I speaking today? I have Belfast International airport in my patch and I know that the very lifeblood of everything we do in Northern Ireland depends on flying. If people are not able to fly from Northern Ireland but have to go from Ireland, it involves a half-day journey, whether by bus, train or car, so the whole of our business and our lives link by flight to major hubs.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I accept entirely what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but there is an excellent service to Luton from Belfast, as I understand, and Luton is connected to London. I would not have thought there was a problem.

**Danny Kinahan:** I very much accept the hon. Gentleman's point of view. When I am flying here, I have a choice of Heathrow, Stansted, Luton or Gatwick. Most of the time Heathrow is the most comfortable because it is the closest to the industry and to getting there quickly, but I accept that I could choose any of those airports. If I had my way, we would need extra runways at each one to build hubs throughout the United Kingdom, because I believe that flying will expand throughout the United Kingdom and the longer we take with debates such as this, the longer it will be before any decisions are taken.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): I know what the hon. Gentleman means. What he says applies not only to him and to others like him coming down to work in this place, but to the CEO of a Chinese, Indian or Brazilian company being able to go to their regional airport,

get into Heathrow and take a short flight out straight to Belfast, where I am sure they will make the Province a richer and better place.

**Danny Kinahan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. That is exactly what I want to see. I want what we see as the northern powerhouse—Northern Ireland—to be the one that thrives, but the name seems to have been borrowed by others.

Some 52% of those travelling by air from Northern Ireland now go via Dublin. Think how much business that 52% represents, going out of the United Kingdom, going to Ireland, going away. The Irish are very clever. They have no air passenger duty so it is cheaper to go that way. They have extremely good roads, very different from the old days. It is easier to drive to Dublin and fly than it is to fly from Belfast to Manchester or Heathrow. If we want to keep things within the Union, we need that help.

The Irish also do visas direct to America, so it is quicker to get to America from Dublin and soon there will be a direct DART railway line to the airport. Everything Ireland does, it does extremely well to improve its connectivity. We need that. That means that today I need the House to take on board that we need the decision quickly. That is what will help us.

One of the reports mentions 179,000 jobs for the whole of the UK, and one source tells me that only about 5,000 might come our way. We got about 40,000 new jobs in the past few years and we need every job we can get for Northern Ireland to improve, thrive and maybe throw off the curses of the past. Belfast international airport has about 4.5 million passengers going through it every year, 44,000 tonnes of freight and a mass of business, not just in Belfast, but all around it. We need that connectivity. I want to push the Union aspect: we need all your help. I appeal for the decision not to take too long, because it matters to us.

3.37 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I think I am right in saying that I am the first Member to speak in this debate who is not from the south-east of England, so I bring a slightly different English perspective. As a number of hon. Members have said, this debate must be about what is right for the United Kingdom. The decision cannot be based only on the views of people in the south-east or those close to either of the airports. It needs to be based on what is right for our nation.

It is clear that aviation connectivity is and will continue to be critical to our economic success. Airbus's global market forecast recently predicted that aviation will grow by 4% a year for the next 20 years and that we will need an additional 30,000 aircraft to be built during that time. Economic growth, the growth in middle classes around the world, affordability and ease of travel, urbanisation and tourism are all factors that are increasing the demand on aviation. Connectivity between people and regions will become more and more important.

Increasing urbanisation will lead to a doubling of the number of mega-cities in the world, and will mean that 99% of the world's long-haul traffic will be between or through those cities. If we want Britain to remain connected to these emerging markets, to keep the British

economy growing and to continue to play our role as one of the world's leading economies, it is imperative that we have the ability to transport passengers and high-value goods between those cities.

As a recently elected Member, I find it incredible that we are having this debate now and that we did not address the issue long ago. As other hon. Members have said, we have been debating it for 20 or 40 years, and Britain has fallen further and further behind as a direct result. We have lost ground on other countries, which are building their air capacity. We see that in Germany and in the middle east, and I was recently at Istanbul airport and could not believe the expansion and modernisation that had taken place there. In looking to the future, we have to address the issue and make sure that Britain keeps pace.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend is right that we have been debating the subject for a long time. Does he share my frustration that we have constantly—even for most of this afternoon—debated central London's connection to the rest of the world rather than Britain's?

**Steve Double:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The decision needs to be about what is right for Britain, and it needs to be partly about connecting the regions of Great Britain and the United Kingdom, not just London, to world markets. I believe that Heathrow provides by far the best opportunity to achieve that.

I am personally of the view that this debate is about which airport we expand first. I think we will look back in 30 or 40 years and wish we had expanded both Heathrow and Gatwick now, because more and more aviation capacity will be required in the years ahead.

Heathrow currently operates at 98% capacity, which means that only the slightest glitch, whether it be bad weather conditions or something else, creates severe problems. It also means that it cannot accommodate the growth that we need so that we as a nation can continue to benefit from connectivity to the emerging markets around the world. Not only would we be foolish not to make a decision now, but future generations would look back and view it as an almost criminal waste of opportunity.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): If it were France that had produced the Davies report, there would be no argument. It would just be steamrollered through.

**Steve Double:** My hon. Friend makes a point that I was about to come on to, although I personally have no desire to live in France or operate in the way that the French sometimes do. We have spent £20 million and three years coming up with an independent report, and it would seem completely foolish not to take the view that it has come to. I am aware that hon. Members have challenged aspects of it today and questioned the veracity of some of the data, but at the end of the day we have an independent report that has taken a great deal of time and cost a lot of money, and we should accept the clear view that it has given.

**Boris Johnson:** Further to the previous intervention, I remind my hon. Friend that the people of France faced exactly the same problem that we have in London and decided to build a huge new hub airport away from the central conurbation.

**Steve Double:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am well aware of his views on that issue, but I would point out that I recently had a meeting with NATS, the air traffic control people, who said that an additional airport to the east of London would create real safety challenges, because there would be a conflict with air traffic from Schiphol airport. I am not sure that is the answer.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the other challenge would be providing rail connections, particularly from the south-west of England? It would be almost impossible to drill a hole under London to connect with that airport.

**Steve Double:** I absolutely agree. I represent St Austell and Newquay, in mid-Cornwall, and the clear view of the vast majority of people there, and particularly the business community, is that Heathrow offers us the best opportunity to connect our region to world markets. We need to remember that this is not just about passengers but about goods and our desire to export them to world markets. Heathrow offers us by the far the best opportunity to achieve that. It is our biggest port, by value, in the whole country. About £100 billion-worth of goods comes in and out of Heathrow every year. Its capacity is far bigger than any of our container ports or ferry ports.

We need to make a decision about this: we cannot procrastinate any longer. I trust that the Government will come forward with a very clear decision in the next few weeks, as they have promised. That decision must be about what is right for our nation and not just take into account the views of a few people in the immediate locality, as much as I respect their views. I am backing Heathrow because I believe it offers by far the best option for our country, and particularly for my region. Let us get on with it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am going to have to drop the time limit to five minutes. I call Fiona Mactaggart.

3.46 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I must apologise to colleagues for being unable to be present for the entire debate, although I was able to listen to some of the earlier contributions, such as the excellent one by the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns).

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) suggested that opposition to Heathrow comes from people who are next door to it. I represent a constituency that is closer to Heathrow than that of most of those who have objected to it. Indeed, if the Davies commission proposals are implemented, the runways will come into Slough borough. Yet my constituents and I recognise that the prosperity of Slough absolutely depends on the prosperity of Heathrow.

I speak to companies in Slough about the ways in which they depend on Heathrow. Let us recall that Slough includes within its boundaries more European headquarters of multinational companies than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland put together. There is a reason for that: its proximity to Heathrow. Those companies say to me, “Our international boards are getting a bit worried about whether we stay here and continue to

invest in the UK.” That is because, universally, they are worried about the future of Heathrow. My first point is therefore that we must make a decision fast. If we do not have a clear conclusion supporting the Davies commission proposals soon, then inward investment, which is extremely significant and necessary for the UK economy, will be very seriously affected.

The one issue that the Davies commission did not deal with sufficiently well is air quality. There is clearly a problem with air quality around Heathrow, but let us be clear that it is not all created by the airport. The M4-M25 motorway junction is the busiest motorway junction in the whole of Europe, and car emissions are the most significant contribution to the NO<sub>x</sub> in the air around the airport. In addition, we have an incinerator that adds to the poor air quality there. I hope that as we deal with these proposals we can expect the Government to put in place things that really make a difference to air quality. The most urgent, in my view, is an electrified western rail link to Heathrow. When the Labour Government discussed Heathrow’s third runway, I refused to back it until I got a commitment from the then Minister that we would electrify the Great Western railway line. We also need rail links from the west to Heathrow, because the failure to have those is one of the important reasons, if not the only one, for the very poor air quality around the airport.

Some Members have said that the third runway is undeliverable because there are so many people under the flight path. Let me point out that they are there because of the prosperity generated by the airport. If we were to move the airport elsewhere, the same thing would happen to an alternative location.

Members on both sides of the House recognise that the prosperity of the UK depends on people being able to work and trade, and on successful inward investment. Frankly, the only option on the table that delivers on all those things is Heathrow. When I was first elected MP for Slough, Heathrow was the most competitive airport in Europe, but it is not now. We have lost flights to international destinations because it is so crowded. There is now no direct flight to Ghana from the UK. People are going to Schiphol or Charles de Gaulle airport in order to get to African destinations. Those airports have more flights than Heathrow to Chinese destinations.

Unless we give Heathrow an additional runway, we will not be able to compete. International passengers want to use Heathrow because of the English language, which is an international export of the UK. None of the alternatives will deliver the connectivity and competitiveness of an expanded Heathrow.

3.51 pm

**Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) for initiating this debate. She cheered up so many Conservative Members with her feistiness on election night, and we can see why she was elected. However, I have to say, as a member of the Transport Committee, that I am an avowed supporter of a third runway at Heathrow.

We have one of the biggest airports in the world, with a proven track record of success, at the edge of one of the greatest cities—possibly the greatest city—in the world, so it is frustrating that we have spent all this time prevaricating and being sucked down by, in effect, glorified nimbyism. I say to Members from west London: “It is

not about you; it is about the future of the United Kingdom.” I find the stance taken by some people in recent years quite frustrating; it really is starting to wear a bit thin. This is not about electoral or mayoral campaigns; it is about the economic future of the UK.

**Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. My constituency is not affected by the airport, either as it is or as it is likely to be, but I gently say to him that this is about evidence. If he reads the report, he will have to recognise that most of its conclusions are undermined by its own evidence. This is one of the most flawed public policy documents ever created. We should base the policy on evidence, not emotion, as he says.

**Mark Menzies:** Actually, I have read the report and the one thing very clear from it is that Davies has given a very strong indication of a preference. It is very frustrating that those who are viscerally opposed to Heathrow refuse, time and again, to provide clear alternative options. Today we have even heard Members say, “Let’s have more reviews and more discussions. Let’s kick it into the long grass.” We have even heard threats that the runway will never be built because of legal challenge.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mark Menzies:** No, I will continue. It is frustrating that national infrastructure issues that affect not just London but my constituents in Fylde are being sucked down to the lowest common denominator of what is right for a handful of constituencies in west London.

**Dr Mathias:** Does my hon. Friend not agree that one of the most damning points in the report is about the lack of connectivity domestically and to long-haul destinations?

**Mark Menzies:** Let us therefore pay tribute to Heathrow, because next March it will introduce direct flights to Inverness. I do not accept some of the arguments that I have heard from right hon. and hon. Members. If we build a third runway, we will increase capacity and the opportunity for improved regional connectivity. People say that there would be no improvement, but that is absolutely a red herring.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mark Menzies:** No, I will not give way.

Everyone aged 70 or less has grown up with Heathrow airport. If people grow up beside what was the busiest airport in the world, they should not be surprised to hear aircraft noise or see planes flying overhead. That is what happens if people choose to live beside what was the busiest international airport in the world. But guess what? It is no longer the busiest international airport in the world, because Governments of several hues have failed to take a decision.

There have been spurious suggestions, such as Boris island. I admire my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) for many things, but to hold that out as a solution is just kicking the problem on to someone else’s turf—kicking it so far down the road that no decision will be taken.

**Sir Simon Burns:** Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that, with improved technology and advances in engineering, the noise of plane engines is decreasing, which will help to address that problem?

**Mark Menzies:** The former Transport Minister makes a valuable point. The Dreamliner A350, for example, not only has 20% lower fuel emissions, but 60% less noise emissions.

For people who grew up or lived beside an airport when aircraft were far noisier than now—we are moving to a future in which aircraft noise is diminishing—the noise argument and, given the more efficient engines, the pollution argument really do not add up. I urge anyone who flies to Heathrow to look at the TV screen in front of their seat and watch whether they fly straight in, or whether they circle in figures of eight for perhaps half an hour or 40 minutes, pumping pollution into the air. Why? Because the aircraft cannot get straight in to land.

**John Mc Nally:** Will this ever get built? I sit on the Environmental Audit Committee, and according to the evidence of one Lord—I cannot remember his name—it will never be built, and the whole £20 million spent on consultation will prove totally useless. What makes the hon. Gentleman think that, in perhaps three, four or five years, we will not end up with more long-haul flights coming in and circling and circling, while regional airports get further squeezed out? Now—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I want short interventions.

**Mark Menzies:** With Blackpool airport in my constituency, I am a passionate believer in regional airports, so I will not bow to the hon. Gentleman on that.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mark Menzies:** I will not; I am conscious of the time. I firmly believe in the importance of Heathrow as the only realistic, viable and deliverable hub airport. In terms of transport connectivity to London, we have the Heathrow Express, the M40 and the M25—I could read out a list of roads connecting to the regions of the United Kingdom—and Crossrail is being built. Also, HS2, which some Members like and some do not, will have a stop at Old Oak Common. If that is not true regional connectivity, I do not know what is. Anyone who suggests that building a second runway at Gatwick will deliver that form of surplus regional connectivity is kidding themselves; that is for the birds, I am afraid. *[Interruption.]* We keep hearing Members with well-heeled constituencies saying from a sedentary position that they are opposed to this airport, but my constituents—

**Zac Goldsmith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mark Menzies:** I will not give way. My constituents, and many others in the regions of the United Kingdom, would be delighted by such an opportunity for jobs and growth—they would absolutely bite your hand off—but we have been pulled down into a very narrow debate about what is right for west London. What is right for the United Kingdom is that we build a third runway

[Mark Menzies]

and identify Heathrow as the hub airport for western Europe. What is right for the United Kingdom is not that we have a fudge, but that the Government's decision is clear and timely, and that we get on with it. Let us get it built.

3.59 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) that I, too, believe in getting on with things and in clarity. They are good, but getting it right is better. The problem with the Davies report is that it gets it fundamentally wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), in a powerful intervention, made the point that although the report puts options on the table, they are not deliverable, because it is so chock-full of internal contradictions. The contradictions have been well highlighted by my hon. Friends the Members for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) and others.

The Heathrow option is so shot through with contradictions that it will be delayed time and again. It is a recipe for judicial review. Attempting to expand Heathrow will be a field day for well-heeled west London lawyers, but it will not deliver the connectivity that is required for the rest of the country. It is a blind alley to go down the Heathrow option. The process is flawed, the consultation is fundamentally flawed and it is not, in my judgment, legally sound.

My second point is that the Heathrow option is economically flawed. It is clear that the case does not stack up. Willie Walsh does not make the comments he is making for the sake of his health, but because the case is economically illiterate.

**Mark Menzies:** The reason Willie Walsh has taken this position is that BA acquired BMI to get its hands on more Heathrow slots. Having spent a vast sum of money acquiring BMI and the Heathrow slots, he does not want lots more Heathrow slots to come along and weaken his economic case.

**Robert Neill:** With respect to my hon. Friend, this is not about one company any more than it is about one individual constituency or one part of London.

The fundamental problem, as has been well demonstrated by other hon. Members in this debate, is that a third runway at Heathrow would be but a sticking plaster that, almost immediately, would be over capacity. There would then be a need for a fourth runway, which would not be achievable in legal or environmental terms because, whatever one thinks about the matter, the Supreme Court judgment has changed things. We cannot ignore that. The truth is that we would be sinking a huge amount of capital into something that would be a white elephant by the time it opened. That is not what I regard as getting on with things or with doing something that is deliverable. That is the key distinction.

We do need to move forward and there is an alternative. Heathrow may well have been the optimal place for an airport in 1948 or 1950. At that time, London was a shrinking city. Its population was reducing and nobody anticipated the massive population growth to come.

Heathrow is no longer in an appropriate place. We therefore have to look at the alternatives. Nobody is saying, and I am certainly not saying, that we should close Heathrow down. It is an important part of the west London economy, but there are more readily deliverable options to increase capacity. I am in favour of increasing airport capacity in London and the south-east.

My constituents, like many of us who wrote a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* today, are not from west London. My constituency is not directly affected by the flight paths, although we do suffer from stacking. The irony is that the stacking would be removed for only a very temporary period by a third runway, because the overcrowding would return, meaning that the stacking would be back until people tried to get a fourth runway, which would be impossible. It is a complete canard or red herring to suggest that it would solve things.

We need to get on with the option that can be most quickly delivered. No option is perfect and I might not have started from this point. I have sympathy with my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst). If we had looked at the Foulness option many years ago, perhaps it would have been attractive, but we are not in that place now and revisiting the idea will not improve its deliverability.

I take the view that the Gatwick option is the right one because it is deliverable. No doubt there will be challenges, but the potential for legal challenge is significantly lower around Gatwick and the issues of dispute are significantly more discrete. It is therefore much more readily deliverable and we have a much better chance of delivering it on time. Having an additional runway at Gatwick would not exclude the possibility of more imaginative options being developed for the future or prejudice other ideas, but it would give us an immediate capacity increase. It would not involve anything like the amount of sunk cost that would be involved in the potentially unviable option of a third runway at Heathrow. Those are all good reasons for opposing Heathrow expansion.

Finally—this is the only thing that I say as a London politician, as I am sure the Minister will understand—I fought the 2010 election and two elections for the London Assembly by saying that I opposed Heathrow expansion. I campaigned twice for my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) to be elected Mayor, while saying that we opposed Heathrow expansion. Call me old-fashioned, but I rather like to keep my promises, and I hope that we can do that for this issue.

4.5 pm

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to respond to the launch by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) of an airport expansion project into Kent and East Sussex. It will not surprise him to hear that that is not the answer I would favour, and neither would it be favoured by many of my friends, colleagues and neighbours in west Kent and Sussex. That is not the answer for the simple reason that it is the wrong answer for people in the London area and the south-east; it is wrong for the country and for our economy. It will not answer the question of economic development or of replacing Schiphol or Charles de Gaulle airports, and it will not answer the challenge that was put so

eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who spoke about the need for hub airports. It is wrong, wrong, wrong, and just because someone does not like Heathrow, that does not mean that the answer is Gatwick.

Three years and £20 million has been spent on this report, and it should not be reversed by a few words in this House. It has taken many years of effort, and it is now the right time for us to settle down and get on with things. When we consider the economic development of the United Kingdom and the challenges that globalisation presents us with, there are those who say, “Why can’t we use Skype or videoconferencing?” The simple answer is that we are humans. We interact, meet and talk, and that is how we do business and communicate.

It is essential that we travel, and part of that demands that we can get to places where we need to be. Although I like the idea of Birmingham, and I would love to see more investment in Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh, in reality, sadly we are all lured to this den of Mammon, this city of London, because it is here where so much of our business is done. I wish it were not so, because in my community of Tonbridge, Edenbridge and West Malling, there is so much opportunity for people to enjoy a proper life that is not ruined by the traffic and the smog that we in London all know.

**Stephen Hammond:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful case for his constituents and for the UK. The other den of Mammon in the world is New York, but that does not have a hub airport. No hub airport anywhere in the world is restricted to three runways, and therefore there is an internal contradiction in the report. New York has three airports—we could also run the New York solution in London.

**Tom Tugendhat:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, but even he will recognise that if we were looking at the United States—I wish people a very happy thanksgiving—we would consider the 50 states and ask, “Where is that den of Mammon?” I think we would all say, “It’s Chicago.” I am afraid that Chicago O’Hare has the appeal that productivity comes from a hub airport.

There is enormous pressure on time, so I will say only that having had Gatwick as a neighbour for a number of years, I have seen what a bad neighbour it is. It has changed flight routes, narrowed flight paths over communities in my area, disrupted lives and ruined sleep—including that of my most immediate constituent: my wife—and it has made the lives of many people in the villages of Penshurst, Chiddingstone and Hever an absolute misery. I urge hon. Members to think hard before rejecting the amount of work that has gone into this report, and before rejecting this opportunity for economic growth for the United Kingdom, so that we can take back our rightful place as the absolute centre of the international community.

4.9 pm

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): We have a duty to deliver a modern competitive economy for ourselves and for future generations. National decisions will always be tough, but they need to be taken in the interests of the country.

It is very clear that the south-east needs additional runway capacity. Sir Howard’s foreword to the Airports Commission report notes that there have been no new

full-length runways built in the south-east since the 1940s. Air travel growth is forecast to slow to a median estimate of 2% a year until 2050, compared with old growth rates of 5% since the 1970s. However, UK passenger numbers are still forecast to increase from 225 million today to 315 million in 2030 and to 445 million by 2050. If we overlay that date with current capacity, it shows Heathrow and Gatwick at 100% capacity by 2020, and all other London airports—Stansted, London City, Luton and Southend—at 100% by 2030. Half the UK population uses air travel each year. It will only grow. As we have a growing international middle class, I certainly want Britain to be a destination of choice. If we want to continue as the global economy we are, these will be constraints to growth.

There was much good news about growth in yesterday’s spending review, but it is predicated on our global economy. We face losing out as a global centre allowing point-to-point travel, particularly in relation to connecting the UK with the new dynamic economies of the world, if we do not get going. We are already lagging behind Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris. We need only look at Dubai. In 2001, it ranked as the 99th in the world in terms of international passengers. By 2011, it was fourth in the world and it will overtake Heathrow as the No. 1 international airport within a year. We are seeing similar meteoric growth at Istanbul, which is rapidly becoming an international hub.

I am not speaking today to suggest Heathrow is the only answer, or to discount Gatwick. The operators of each airport have made their own persuasive arguments and the economics of expansion for the country are obvious. What I would like to emphasise is the benefit of regional airports, particularly in the shorter and intermediate sector. I note, to the great benefit no doubt of Southampton, the support in the spending review yesterday for new air routes to Munich and Lyon.

Returning to the Heathrow versus Gatwick argument, this is a matter for right hon. and hon. Members in those areas to overcome. There are obvious connectivity, air quality and noise issues to consider. I am here to put on the table a relief valve for current pressures. Whatever is decided, the lead time before expansion will be a decade, a decade in which we will fall further behind in the international aviation league. Too often, the UK is behind the curve, whether on energy generation, railways, roads, Thames crossings and airport provision. That is a criticism of all Governments in the past 30 years.

To increase capacity in the south-east, and free up valuable slots and develop and accommodate growth, we have Manston airport, which is just 80 miles away. It is ready to go within months to take freight-only aircraft from both Heathrow and Gatwick, to offer new routes in the low-cost market, and as an immediate solution to opening up additional intercontinental routes, particularly to growing markets. It will never be, it could not be and I would not want it to be a major hub airport.

As Members may know, Manston airport was closed a year ago and sits unused. It has an uncertain future. In both parts of Thanet, north and south, there is a desire for aviation activity to recommence and with it the opportunities, for instance, for emergency provision—the Virgin incident last year blocked Gatwick for eight hours. We also have the opportunity for new industries in the UK, including big jet dismantling and recycling.

[Craig Mackinlay]

I bet Members must wonder why all this has not already happened. Very simply, the UK Independence party-run local authority was elected on a single strong policy of promising back-to-back compulsory purchase orders, but it has given up and backed out of the deal. There we are: a huge runway sitting idle. It is well connected and can take any size of aircraft, but it is doing nothing.

**Robert Neill:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. From my experience as a Communities and Local Government Minister, I am aware of the benefits that Manston would bring. Does he not also agree that, fortunately, Conservative-controlled Kent County Council takes a much more progressive and sensible view of the value of economic growth in this area? In fact, the development of Manston would be entirely consistent with our devolution of economic powers to our regions and shire counties.

**Craig Mackinlay:** I thank my hon. Friend, and I tend to agree that Kent County Council is a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to supporting Manston, but it could be a key driver for economic development.

**Bob Stewart:** As my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and I both know, Manston was an emergency airstrip in the second world war. It was a very long one, and the biggest aeroplanes are capable of landing there, so this is quite a good idea.

**Craig Mackinlay:** I thank my hon. Friend for his useful comments.

To conclude, I am making an appeal from this Chamber for potential operators to come and look again at what Manston has and what it can offer as a regional airport that can provide for the next 10 years some immediate relief from the lack of capacity that we have on our doorstep at both Heathrow and Gatwick. Whatever decision is made—whether it be Gatwick or Heathrow—this country's economic growth and survival as a major global player need solutions. Whatever the solution is, please let us get to that decision quickly; let us make it, and start building.

4.16 pm

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Mr Deputy Speaker, as it is a very important one to my constituents. I thank my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) for speaking so passionately on this subject. She has done so for many years, and today has been no exception.

I need no persuasion that we need another airport in the south-east, that we need one soon and that we need to get on and make the decision. I am afraid that I am entirely unconvinced by the hypothesis—it has not been presented in this House today—that Britain will not lose out if we do not build a new runway soon, because we will. The question for me, then, is simply where—not whether—we are going to build the new runway.

This is plainly a difficult political question, so the Government were right to seek an independent report on it. There is no requirement, however, for the Government

slavishly to follow the conclusions of that report. I know that they will consider it very carefully. We are elected politicians: we do not outsource things to so-called experts; we consider the evidence and we make decisions in the interests of the country and our constituents.

I want to pick up on three things in the Davies report, and these are essentially the three brakes that Davies put on expansion at Heathrow, all of which significantly undermine the case for adding a third runway there. The first is the ban on night flights. Noise pollution from Heathrow already disturbs more people in west London than any comparable airport in Europe. To get around that problem, Davies has suggested a partial ban on night flights.

Leaving aside the scepticism of local people that any such rule would be honoured in the breach, this makes little sense if the idea of a new runway is to allow us to increase airport capacity and allow flights from more destinations. Banning night flights would reduce the number of connections with places such as Hong Kong, Singapore and China, as well as deter some low-cost carriers.

Davies's second predicate on expansion at Heathrow is the meeting of air-quality targets, which he said must be met before any aeroplanes are allowed to take off from the third runway. Air pollution already kills an estimated 10,000 Londoners every year, so it is right that reducing air pollution should be one of the caveats on allowing additional flights from Heathrow. This is a caveat, however, that cannot possibly be met any time soon. It is certainly not a caveat that can be met in the next few years, even on the basis that Heathrow stands still and there is no expansion, so how can it possibly be met if we add a third runway? I cannot see how a third runway, with more flights and more pollution, would do anything to reduce the current levels at Heathrow. By contrast, Gatwick has never breached EU or UK annual air-quality limits. We have heard of political decisions that would have led to “bridges to nowhere” and “roads to nowhere” in Alaska. What we do not want is a runway to nowhere at Heathrow, because that would not solve the urgent need for additional airport capacity.

The third predicate is that Parliament should legislate against a fourth runway at Heathrow. I have to say that, for my constituents, the fact that Davies says that we must legislate against the runway being built rather underscores the risk that that is what would happen if we did not. Besides, legislation would give no comfort to my constituents, because it would merely mean that the issue of the fourth runway would have to be debated in the House before the runway was ever built.

My constituents are already quite badly affected by noise from Heathrow, although they are not even under one of the flightpaths. What I am concerned about—particularly on behalf of my constituents in New Malden—is that one of the flightpaths from a new third runway would go directly over their houses, as is clear from the plan.

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): The effect of noise disruption has been raised regularly by Members who represent constituencies near Heathrow as an argument against the third runway. May I put on record the disruption experienced by my own constituents, who are hugely affected by flights to and from Gatwick? Hundreds of them came to a public meeting that was

held recently to discuss this very issue. There may be fewer flights, but there is less ambient noise, so the effect of the flights is magnified.

**James Berry:** I thank my hon. Friend for that information. I am sure that when my hon. Friend is up in London, she will welcome the fact that the third runway will not go ahead—for, like other Members who are present, I feel that the legal challenges are so great that even if Parliament approves the runway, it will not go ahead.

I do not forget for one moment that a number of my constituents work at Heathrow airport, but the fact is that if a third runway is not built at Heathrow, the airport will not close down. It will not go away. It will still be one of the busiest airports in the world, and it will still be a big provider of jobs for people in London and people in my constituency.

People agree that we need more airport capacity. Nearly everyone agrees that we need to get on and make a decision. I do not demur from the proposition that choosing a major international airport hub is something that we need to get on with, but the solution is not a third runway at Heathrow.

4.22 pm

**Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) on securing the debate. Its timing is fortuitous, given that it comes the day after we were reminded so starkly, in the autumn statement, of the importance to the UK of a growing and successful economy.

If we are to ensure that our economic legacy to future generations is not just billions and billions of pounds of debt—if we are to ensure that the future prosperity of our country is not trapped in the south-east of England, but embraces all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom—we shall have some very difficult, but necessary, decisions to make. As we were reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham, the Government have made commitments in the past, but also about Gatwick, and Ministers are fully aware of the intense passions that the debate will incite, as was so eloquently noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). I think that the Government acted with great foresight in setting up an independent commission and giving it the funds, the resources and the time that it needed, as well as access to every conceivable expert, thus enabling it to produce a report that had been fully worked through. The result of that work is a clear, unequivocal and unanimous recommendation in favour of expansion at Heathrow.

The economic case presented by the commission is overwhelming. It estimates that Heathrow expansion would result in a two-thirds better solution than expansion at Gatwick. According to analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there is a £50 billion gap; according to other analyses that have used the best possible results for each expansion, the gap could be as wide as £90 billion. Heathrow expansion would also result in a far superior increase in the number of long-haul routes, with a 20% increase in the number of long-haul destinations.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the £147 billion figure that is given in the report has been challenged by the Airports Commission's own economic

advisers? The difference between the benefits of expansion at Heathrow and those of expansion at Gatwick is very small.

**Jeremy Quin:** I have seen letters from the commission, dated 7 September and 28 September, rebutting several points, including that one.

We are talking about a 28% increase in the number of long-haul destinations. Of course it is important that we entertain President Xi and Prime Minister Modi in this place, but if we are to take part in the global international race we hear about so much, we need UK CEOs boarding planes daily and weekly to the cities and areas those leaders represent. We will know we are winning that global race when we have Chinese, Brazilian and Indian CEOs gracing the streets of Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow, Belfast, Newcastle and, indeed, Newquay.

Domestic flights into Heathrow have been crowded out in the last 25 years, as Davies sets out, but his report also states:

“Our discussions with stakeholders in the nations and regions revealed very clearly the importance that they attach to direct links to Heathrow because of the access provided to its substantial long-haul route network.”

**Boris Johnson:** I hesitate to remind my hon. Friend of what has already been said, but the Davies commission itself admits that the number of international long-haul flights will increase by only seven destinations by 2030 and by a further seven by 2050, while the number of domestic destinations will actually fall from seven to four.

**Jeremy Quin:** The letter of 28 September to the chair of the Greater London Authority mentioned

“10 to 12 additional long-haul routes at the airport in 2040, an increase of 20%”

and defines

“a ‘daily destination’ as one seeing more than 360 services a year”.

These are the types of services required by CEOs regularly going to visit their clients and bringing them back to the UK.

I accept that today's debate is not just about economic arguments—one third of the report details the environmental and local community concerns. Those issues were due to occupy a third of my speech, but, taking my lead from the Chair, I do not think that that would be welcomed. None the less, I would welcome the establishment of an independent noise authority, which could bring huge benefits to places all over the country that suffer from aircraft noise, including rural areas, which have less ambient noise and can be particularly badly affected.

Despite the remorseless and gallant campaign by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), air quality in parts of our great capital is not what we would desire and must be improved. I believe that the Davies commission treated this issue seriously, and I recognise that, as stated by the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), the most troublesome points are those by the M4 and the M25. I take it from the report that practical measures can be taken to improve air quality. I thank the Davies commission for its comprehensive and convincing report, and I look forward to the Government's response.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. If we can shave a minute off each Front-Bench speech, Adam Afriyie will get his five minutes.

4.28 pm

**Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, although I shall try not to use the five minutes, to give the Front-Bench speakers time to respond.

I would like to make some remarks about competition and markets, and this weird belief that Heathrow Airport Holdings Limited, a private limited company owned 100% by overseas shareholders, is still part of our national state-owned infrastructure. It might perform part of that function, but it is not a state-owned enterprise.

First, however, a quick word on noise: Heathrow airport is currently the noisiest airport in Europe. Sixty-eight times more people are affected by noise around Heathrow, south-west London and Berkshire than are affected by Gatwick. If the Davies commission assumptions are correct, in 60 years' time—I am not sure how we can say with any accuracy what will happen 60 years from now—27 times more people will be affected by noise and pollution from Heathrow than if there was an expansion at Gatwick.

Heathrow Airport Holdings Limited is a privately owned company. I thank the Minister for his answer to my question about the infrastructure required as a direct result of expansion, but the Government have said they will not spend taxpayers' money on this. Were they to do so, it would probably end up involving £15 billion or £20 billion, which would equate to a £300 subsidy to a private company from every person in the United Kingdom, so I am glad that that is not happening. On the other hand, Heathrow seems to be thinking, "Hang on, the taxpayer should subsidise us, a foreign-owned private company." That is unacceptable; I do not think that the public would accept that kind of behaviour.

I hope that we will not decide on Heathrow, because that would not be in the national, regional or local interests, or in our economic interests. Were we to do so, we would be further entrenching an existing market-dominant player. Conservative Members, and probably most others as well, feel that that is not the kind of monopolistic practice that we should be entrenching.

Let us look at the economics. At the moment, it already costs £26 per passenger to land at Heathrow, which is not very competitive. The cost at Gatwick is £8.63. The cost following the construction of a new runway at Heathrow has been calculated at about £30 per passenger, which is not particularly economically viable, given that the price in the rest of Europe is generally between £18 and £20. So let us not assume that an extra runway at Heathrow would be cost-effective or economically beneficial, because that is not necessarily the case.

As I have said, Conservative Members would certainly not wish to entrench semi-monopolies. Let us look at the evidence on competition. When Gatwick put on a flight to Moscow, the price dropped from £700-plus to £350. Surely we believe in that kind of competition. I have a long history in business, and some might argue that business people such as chief executive officers are desperate for expansion at Heathrow. Utter nonsense! What CEOs and other business people are interested in is being able to get on a flight and get to where they

want to go, whether from Gatwick or Heathrow. They will choose to fly from wherever the price is lowest and the connection the quickest. So I think those objections can be put to one side.

I want to return to the point about projecting 60 years hence. We cannot predict tomorrow's weather, so the idea that we can predict what the economic consequences of this decision on Heathrow will be 60 years hence is quite bizarre. I should like to quote the former director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, John Kay, who rubbished the entire methodology, saying:

"The Commission purports to describe in immense detail the evolution of air transport over the next 60 years, even which routes airlines will choose to fly."

Anyone with an economic or business background will know that that is simply not possible.

The judgment that we need to make today is also about the type of model that future aviation will adopt. We keep talking about a hub. I have written to British Airways, to Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd, to the Ministers and to several authorities connected to aviation to ask what constitutes a hub. I asked them to show me some sort of model, but none has been forthcoming. This idea that the hub will continue to operate exactly as it does now is a comfort blanket. And even if we do require a hub, like the one with two runways that we have at the moment, no one is arguing that Heathrow should close. The two-runway hub will continue as more modern forms of transport, such as point-to-point transport, arrive. Now, 90% of all the aircraft being ordered by airlines are suited to point-to-point transport and not to the old hub and spoke model.

4.33 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** This is the issue that will not go away. Ever since I was elected to this Parliament, everywhere I go people want to know what we think and what will happen—not on Scottish independence, although that issue might not go away for some time, but on the extra runway at Heathrow or Gatwick. I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) on securing this debate. She made a forensic case in her opening remarks, and she is a credit to her constituents for doing so. She focused on the economic issues, noise and environmental questions, and she spoke very well as she made her case.

I cannot mention all the speakers who contributed to the debate, but I would like to focus on a few of them. It would be remiss of me not to begin with the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) and the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who has now rejoined us. This was the second mayoral hustings that I have sat through; the first was in a Westminster Hall debate on London taxis. I expect that both of them will be debating this issue for some time over the coming months. They highlighted a number of concerns with the report, and it is obvious from their statements that they are both equally passionate about London. I wish them both well as they seek to deal with this in more detail.

During the speech of the right hon. Member for Tooting, the most amazing thing occurred: the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who is no longer in his place, broke out as an ally of the Scottish National party—it surprised me probably as much as this will surprise him—when he used the line, "Why is it all about London?"

That is the point from which we come at this. Although we understand that London is Scotland's closest global financial hub and that we have to have a relationship with it, whether Scotland is part of the UK or not, we must not lose sight of issues relating to regional airports, to which I will return.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) raised serious concerns on behalf of her constituents, and did so excellently. The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), whom I met on my first day in this House, when he gave me a few hints and tips on how to deal with some Members, said that Stansted will be “engraved” on his heart. As it is him, I will avoid the obvious joke about Tories having hearts and instead say that he gave a thorough and historical analysis of the wider airport expansion debate, and that this debate was all the better for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who has had to leave us early, rightly stands up for and praises Glasgow airport, which has become my second home over the past six months. I am sure the whole Chamber will wish to join me in congratulating it on being crowned UK airport of the year. He rightly asks the Government to clear up any confusion as to whether this will be deemed an English-only matter, and I hope the Minister will do that.

The right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns), who kindly gave us new Members our induction in this very Chamber when we were first elected, gave an excellent speech. He illustrated the frustration, clear among Members from all parts of the House, that plagues this whole issue, and of course did so authoritatively, as a former Transport Minister. The right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), for whom I have great respect, also spoke with authority, demanding that we treat this as a national issue, and saying that that should be what guides us, as opposed to local concerns. I have to say that local concerns must be given consideration, although I agree that the issue is of national importance.

It was of course over this very issue, in the last Labour Government, that the shadow Chancellor protested in this Chamber by using the Mace. We may be the noble savages, but I have no ambition to do that this evening. We will of course hear the Labour spokesman's remarks in a few moments, but I want to give some comfort to the shadow Chancellor, who, unfortunately, is not in his place this evening. I found a quote from one Chairman Mao, who once said, “To rebel is justified.” *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby), who sits on the Treasury Bench, still has his copy of the book.

As for the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), where do I begin, Madam Deputy Speaker? He spoke with his usual passion and authority in a good-natured but rather surprising contribution. I am delighted that he believes, along with the SNP, that this is not an English-only matter, and we should have a say on this; he has aligned himself solidly with the interests of the SNP and the people of Scotland as far as this debate is concerned, so for that we are grateful. My fellow Transport Committee member, the hon. Member for Flyde—

**Mark Menzies:** Flyde.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I will get there one day; it is normally hon. Members from south of the border who struggle with these things, rather than those from the north of it. The hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) is a strong and staunch supporter of Blackpool airport in his constituency, and I know he has spoken out in other debates in the House on that, as he did today. He again mentioned the importance of securing regional connectivity. That is something the Government could do, and we will be pressing for that through public service obligations. I would be grateful to the Minister if he addressed that this evening. That is a concern not just for us in Scotland, but in other parts of England, such as the north-east.

Earlier this year, in their “Programme for Government”, the Scottish Government announced the setting up of three innovation and investment centres across Europe—in Brussels, Dublin and London. That gives Scottish firms an opportunity to do business on a world stage, which we have not always been good at, right here in London. As I have said, London is our closest major financial centre, and we will examine this decision forensically. At the moment, we remain agnostic, and we will seek to get the best possible deal for Scotland and for our constituents. The frustration is there, and the Government must make a decision.

4.40 pm

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) on securing the debate, and thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the debate to take place. I thank, too, all the Members who have spoken today, but I will not attempt to go through all their contributions. If I had done a scorecard, I think we would have seen that 12 Members were broadly against Heathrow, and 10 were broadly in favour—I am not including those on the Front Benches. I wish to make particular mention of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who will be debating this issue a lot more in the coming months.

It is always a pleasure to see my opposite number, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), and I look forward to hearing what he has to say. We had hoped to hear from the Transport Secretary, as he is a member of the mysterious Government sub-committee considering this issue. We would have appreciated a report from him, but it looks as if we will have to wait for that.

The aviation sector is a key pillar of our economy. I hope that the House will forgive me if I say that it is also an industry that makes our world a smaller place. It fosters direct face-to-face contact and understanding between peoples across the globe in a way that no other industry or mode of travel does. It is for that reason that aviation is a central target for those who want to kill, terrorise, undermine that understanding, and spread fear among those going about their daily lives. We were reminded of that with the Sharm el-Sheikh tragedy just a few weeks ago. It underlines why the decisions that our Parliament was wrestling with this morning are so profound, not only for our country as a whole, but for those working in aviation. It is why it is right that we pay tribute today to all those who work in the civil aviation sector, on the ground and in the air.

[Richard Burden]

As I said at the outset, the aviation industry is vital to the economy, generating around £50 billion in GDP, around a million jobs, and £8 billion in tax revenue. In 2014, UK airports handled 238 million passengers. We also know that aviation accounts for around 6% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions and that there are issues of noise. The Volkswagen emissions scandal originated in the automotive industry, rather than in aviation, and the public are increasingly demanding transparency and action on air quality issues, too. That is why the work of the Sustainable Aviation Network is so important. Bringing together airlines, airports, airspace managers, aircraft manufacturers, unions and so many more, it is already making a big contribution to the challenges that aviation faces in the years ahead.

The introduction and development of sustainable fuels could make a major contribution to reducing emissions. Aircraft technology is another issue. We have heard about the lighter, smaller aircraft, such as the 787 and the A350, that could take long-haul flights. There are also new initiatives in airspace management. Even though airports have seen their passenger numbers increase by more than 5%, their carbon footprint has fallen by almost 3%. Continuing with the sustainable aviation agenda is fundamentally important not just for this debate, but for jobs and skills in the UK.

Turning to the issue of airport capacity, we were promised a response to the commission before Christmas, and we await to hear from the Minister when we can expect it. Our job as the Opposition is to scrutinise the response, and we have been clear about the four tests against which we will measure it when it comes. Two of those are about the environmental challenges posed by the different options put forward for additional runway capacity at either Heathrow or Gatwick: first, how far the UK's climate change obligations can still be met; and, secondly, how local noise and environmental impacts can be managed and minimised. Davies said that the expansion of Heathrow had to be contingent—his word—on the latter point being addressed. Gatwick and Heathrow have both told me why they believe their plans meet those tests. But both rely on scenarios that require action from the Government, and Davies himself emphasised that the choices made by the Government will make the difference to what can be achieved.

On noise, for example, airports and airspace managers need to know whether the framework is to concentrate noise geographically or to disperse it. Whatever they decide, why cannot the Government now agree in principle with the Davies commission's proposal for an independent aviation noise authority, with statutory consultation rights? That could be agreed now.

If the expansion of Gatwick or Heathrow is to help rather than hinder the UK in meeting our carbon or air quality targets, we require a big modal shift, with a transformation in the way that greater numbers of people and goods travel to and from those airports. What actions will the Government take to ensure that their conclusions on airport expansion, whatever they are, are compatible with our environmental obligations?

As for our other two tests, we will be looking for clearer answers from the Government on how their decision on Davies will meet the capacity challenge. Everyone agrees that the capacity in the south-east needs reviewing; that

is why Labour supported the establishment of the commission. But there are very different answers from Heathrow, Gatwick and others about the kind of additional capacity needed, and how that will inform where any new runway in the south-east should go. What are the Government's conclusions about the differing impact that different decisions will have on short-haul capacity, long-haul capacity, regional air connectivity, transfer traffic and the relative growth of point-to-point and hub traffic?

That brings me to the fourth test that we ask the Minister to address. This cannot be simply about how well or badly air travel serves the south-east. The issue of connectivity to other parts of the UK is vital, as too is seeing this as an opportunity for rebalancing growth across the regions. While the question of a new runway at Heathrow, Gatwick or neither is a key decision for UK aviation, it is not the only one. Whatever decision is made on Heathrow or Gatwick, it will take eight, nine or 10 years to implement—longer, if there are legal challenges.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Richard Burden:** I would like to, but there is not time.

Aviation will not stand still in that time. Businesses will still need new routes to connect with existing and emerging markets. New aircraft such as the A350 and the B787 offer new possibilities for the economics of expanded point-to-point travel. If we are serious about rebalancing our economy, we must ensure that those routes are not simply dependent on what happens in the south-east.

Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, and—for freight—East Midlands are all international gateways to the UK in their own right and deserve to be treated as such. Will the Minister put the upgrading of rail links for the west Anglia lines in the next rail investment control period, to allow Stansted to achieve its potential in the south-east? Will he confirm that Manchester airport will be linked directly to HS2?

Having accepted the sense of Labour's plan to create a National Infrastructure Commission, will the Minister endorse the call from my hon. Friend the shadow Transport Secretary for it to examine the long-term road and rail needs of airports and other transport gateways throughout the country, not simply in the south-east? Finally, when can we expect the promised review of the future of air passenger duty, looking at its purpose and how options for reform can improve the competitiveness of different airports in a devolved environment?

4.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury)—my one time cycling partner—and the Backbench Business Committee on securing this debate. We have heard some remarkable and passionate speeches—indeed, I look forward to the mayoral hustings next year. In contrast, my speech will be unremarkable, because at this point in the process the Government are engaged in dispassionate, clear-headed analysis of the Davies report.

The coalition Government set up the Airports Commission to take a fresh, independent and comprehensive look at our current and future aviation needs. I thank Sir Howard once again for his diligent work, which covers not only new airport capacity but how to improve our existing airport infrastructure, including in the regions. The future of our aviation industry is of immense importance to this country and to many of our constituents, as we have heard, so I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this excellent debate.

The UK aviation sector employs about 230,000 people directly and many more indirectly—for example, in the supply chain. Tax revenues from the industry are £8.7 billion per year and air freight carries goods worth over £100 billion a year between the UK and non-EU countries—that is more than 40% of our non-EU trade by value.

What is often overlooked when we discuss aviation in this country is that we are incredibly well connected: we have the third-largest aviation network in the world, after the USA and China; the number of passengers using our non-London airports has increased by over a third since 2000; and London remains one of the world's best-connected cities, with at least weekly connections to over 360 destinations. In comparison, Paris serves about 300 routes and Frankfurt about 250. Air connectivity is one of the major reasons three-quarters of Fortune 500 companies have offices in London. The airport capacity constraints we are seeing today are in fact a symptom of Britain's success and the aviation industry's success in attracting new business.

Maintaining our international and domestic UK connectivity is critical if we want to continue growing as a country and as an economy. We are focusing on a wide range of issues—not only capacity—that support our aviation sector. Airspace, for example, is a critical piece of our national infrastructure. That is why it is vital we work to optimise capacity, maintain air safety, reduce air traffic delays, and mitigate aviation's impact on the environment. The CAA's future airspace strategy is designed to do this, and the Government support that important initiative. The Government are also providing support to our airports through improving surface access.

The Airports Commission worked for two and a half years and consulted widely before coming to its conclusions. As we are all aware, it recommended that additional runway capacity is needed in the south of England. What Sir Howard called the “optimal” solution was that that should take the form of a new north-west runway at Heathrow. The commission also recommended a package of mitigation measures, including a night flight ban, a noise levy and a community engagement board, to name a few. The full list of mitigation measures is on pages 10 and 11 of the final report. The Government have been reviewing the commission's findings, but we have not yet made any decision, which, the House will be aware, limits what I can say today.

Several colleagues were critical of the Airports Commission's report. The Department has received a number of representations critical of the way in which certain issues are addressed in the commission's final report, including air quality, noise, surface access, economic benefits, deliverability, financing, and capacity and connectivity. We have taken the matters raised into account as part of the wider programme of work considering the commission's recommendations. My Department has considered and continues to consider carefully the

representations submitted, to identify whether the issues they deal with have already been examined by the commission or affect the overall validity of the commission's evidence and recommendations.

Noise is, of course, a contentious issue, and the commission has taken into account the noise impacts of each scheme, including potential mitigation measures. We need to recognise that aircraft are becoming less noisy and more fuel efficient, particularly those that adopt Rolls-Royce engines. None the less, we understand local communities' concerns about noise and we are carefully examining the evidence provided to the Airports Commission, including on potential environmental mitigation.

The Government take seriously the issue of air quality. It is a complex issue and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has just consulted on its draft action plan. As we know from our discussion on Volkswagen, a number of issues in connection with other transport modes also impact on air quality. Many of the problems around our major airports are as much due to the traffic as to aviation activity. We are considering the detailed analysis contained in the Airports Commission's final report and any decision regarding future airport capacity will take into account the Government's overall plan to improve air quality and our commitment to comply with EU air quality standards.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) raised the issue of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The Government take UK climate change commitments very seriously and are committed to meeting them. The commission engaged with the Committee on Climate Change when undertaking its extensive work on greenhouse gas emissions, including considering the impacts of expansion under two different policy frameworks, both carbon capped and carbon traded. The Government are carefully examining the evidence. Any decision on future airport capacity will take into account the UK's climate change policy and the 2008 climate change obligation. I am hopeful that we can get agreement globally on a global market-based mechanism for trading carbon, which would be the ultimate goal to ensure that aviation plays its part in reducing carbon emissions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth raised the issue of mitigation measures. The Airports Commission recommended that should the Heathrow north-west runway scheme be taken forward, a package of measures be put in place to limit the impacts of expansion on communities, including the introduction of a noise envelope, a predictable respite regime, a ban on night flights between 11.30 pm and 6 am, and a commitment that no fourth runway be built at Heathrow airport. If it is decided that there is a need for additional capacity and that there should be a new runway, whatever its location, we will ensure that there will be a package of measures to balance the benefits of expansion with the interests of communities.

I am sorry I have not been able to touch on every point that was raised in the debate, but let me stress again that many of the issues raised here today are the priorities and concerns of the Government. I thank all those who contributed to this excellent debate. It is clear that we live in an ever-changing world. We have to get this decision right, recognising its impact. We have heard a wide range of views representing a wide range

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

of people. We do not want to hide the challenge on airport capacity. People rightly have strong views, but Sir Howard Davies's commission has produced a powerful report that has earned the right to close scrutiny and analysis.

4.57 pm

**Dr Mathias:** I thank every Member who contributed to the debate. The subject is indeed of national interest. I especially appreciate colleagues from Scotland making very worthy points. I appreciate the Secretary of State taking time from his busy schedule to listen to our debate. I take heart from that. I thank the Minister for the points he made.

Yes, the UK's aviation industry is very important to our economy. I point out, though, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) said, that the report of the Davies commission ruins its own logic. I thank the Minister for saying that connectivity is important and I am sure he heard, as I did, Members talking about regional competition and the importance of connectivity for us.

If an additional runway is needed in the south of England, I greatly appreciate what the Minister said about mitigation measures, but if they can be put in place for a third runway, I ask the Minister, as other Members have done, to put them in place now for the two-runway system, please, because it is not tolerable. A quasi-night ban is not enough—not six and a half hours. It must be at WHO levels.

If we are to attack climate change and have an internationally recognised aviation industry, our pollution levels must be set at higher standards, not at that recommended by the report with all its faults. I appreciate the South Thanet relief valve because I agree that this is a long-term programme, whichever option the Government choose, and we need to think about our capacity now.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who contributed to the debate. I remind the Government of the promise made in 2009—no ifs, no buts, no third runway.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Business without Debate

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE DRAFT INVESTIGATORY POWERS BILL

*Ordered,*

That—

(1) Valerie Vaz be discharged from the Joint Committee on the draft Investigatory Powers Bill and Shabana Mahmood be added; and

(2) this House concurs with the Lords [Message of 25 November] that the Joint Committee should report on the draft Bill by 11 February 2016.—(*Simon Kirby.*)

## Royal Agricultural University (Funding)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Simon Kirby.*)

5 pm

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise this important topic so that I can highlight the inequity and inappropriateness of, and real damage caused by, a decision made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England with respect to the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, which is based in my constituency and of which I am an alumnus.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Skills for being here tonight. In his previous guise as Planning Minister, he and I did successful and fruitful business. I hope that tonight's debate will be equally fruitful. I am particularly grateful to him for being here since this debate is not a matter of his ministerial responsibility. He is standing in for my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science.

HEFCE has deemed that the RAU is no longer eligible even to apply for specific funding based on its role as a specialist higher education institution. In the next few minutes, I want to outline the extreme damage that that will do to the institution in my constituency. The impact on the institution will be substantial and potentially highly damaging. It will lead to the precipitous loss of £1.45 million per annum in 2016-17 and subsequently, which is more than 56% of its grant funding from the funding council. That represents 50% more than the RAU's current surplus, which was just over £1 million last year. If the cut takes place, it will throw the university into deficit, with inevitable impacts on its staffing, investment, student facilities and services. For obvious reasons it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further on that tonight, but it is safe to say that the impact of this funding decision on what the RAU is able to do could be catastrophic. A 56% reduction will be huge, and will undoubtedly have a massive impact on the world-class teaching that it delivers. The knock-on effect on the teaching of agribusiness around the world will be significant.

The Government have been looking for diversification in the higher education sector, to provide students with opportunities that are different from the traditional, academic university route. The RAU provides a different option for school leavers to develop skills in agribusiness and other agricultural sectors. The cut may well lead to a reduction in the diversity of higher education opportunities in this country.

That is compounded by the different decision that the funding council has made for comparable and competitor institutions, which may continue to apply for specialist funding. I will name them—they are Harper Adams University and Writtle College. The RAU will therefore have to compete against those rivals on a potentially very different funding basis, which will make attracting students to courses provided by the RAU very challenging.

To give a bit of history, the RAU is the oldest specialist agricultural college in the English-speaking world, having been established in 1845. Initially a private college, it entered the public sector as a university college in 2001 and became a full university in 2013 under the changes

that the coalition Government introduced. It has a strong and long-standing national and international reputation. Indeed, I have personally been involved in furthering its formal links with three Chinese universities—Shandong Agricultural University in east China and the China Agricultural University and Tsinghua University in Beijing. It also has formal and informal links with many other educational institutions across the world.

Since the RAU has been in the public sector it has, like a number of prestigious specialist institutions, received institution specific funding—ISF—from HEFCE in recognition of the particular costs associated with providing facilities for such specialist education. The university provides higher education in agriculture and food, land management and agribusiness to an increasing number of students. Numbers have more than doubled since it entered the public sector and now stand at about 1,200. Applications rose again last year, as they have done over a number of years, and in 2014 the RAU was the third highest performing UK university for student employability, with more than 98% of its graduates entering the workplace. This year it was named by *The Sunday Times* as the university of the year for student retention. Employability and retention are two of the key criteria that the Government set in their recent Green Paper as measures of teaching excellence.

This year, HEFCE reviewed the criteria for eligibility to apply for ISF. Eligibility now rests on the percentage of students at an institution studying the defined speciality. The percentage chosen by HEFCE was an arbitrary 60%, and the consequences were pointed out by the RAU during HEFCE's consultation. Eligibility of students for the relevant speciality is based on the coding of courses offered—something that was dictated to the RAU by HEFCE when the RAU joined the public sector in 2003. On this basis, HEFCE has deemed the clearly specialist RAU to be ineligible for ISF, while immediately comparable and competitor institutions are allowed by HEFCE to code their students differently and to remain eligible for consideration. The RAU is being put at a disadvantage compared with its competitors simply because its similar range of courses is required by HEFCE to use different HESA—Higher Education Statistics Agency—codes. This seems to be an anti-competitive and oppressive decision by HEFCE, and one that is counter to Government policy.

One of the most frustrating aspects of this is that HEFCE has decided not only to withdraw the funding but to prevent the RAU from even applying for it. Naturally, ISF funding remains a decision-making process. The RAU would be more than happy to bid for funds in this competitive process, but it has been denied the opportunity to do so. Entirely ruling out the RAU from this process from the beginning seems contrary to all the rules of natural justice.

In the updated grant letter to HEFCE on 21 July this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills wrote:

“I would like you (HEFCE) to do this (manage the reduction on overall HEFCE grant) in ways that protect as far as possible high cost subjects...widening participation...and small and specialist institutions”.

He also specifically instructed HEFCE to

“ensure that no institution faces a disproportionate reduction in their HEFCE allocation”.

I put to my hon. Friend the Minister that this is totally contrary to what my right hon. Friend had said.

The decision by the board of HEFCE to change the criteria will, as I said, result in a reduction in grant funding to the RAU of some £1.45 million, or over 56%. I believe that the person on the Clapham omnibus would surely recognise the RAU as a small and specialist institution, and 56% as a disproportionate reduction in its HEFCE allocation. That same person would also wonder at a decision that endangered a specialist institution in the field of agriculture, food, land and environmental management at a time when food security and the environment feature so high on the Government's agenda, not only in this country but internationally. Removing the funding will have potentially very significant consequences for agricultural education in this country.

I appreciate that HEFCE is an arm's length body and that Ministers should not usually intervene on individual decisions. However, I believe that the Minister has a role to play in this situation. Government, after all, set the parameters of what they wish to achieve for higher education and provide HEFCE with the funds to do so. When the organisation then makes a decision that is so unfair and that will have such far-reaching effects on an individual institution, and on the realisation of Government ambitions, I would have thought that the Minister would want to intervene. Indeed, the work of the RAU also contributes to the Government's international development aims, by helping some of the poorest countries in the world, such as those in Africa, to grow their own food.

The RAU has made a much-appreciated effort to make agriculture one of the key British exporting industries, with the aim of getting British food exported around the world. This cut will make that function much more difficult.

HEFCE has offered to discuss what transitional funding might be available. Although that may be better than nothing and may alleviate things in the short term, it does not detract from the fundamental unfairness that undermines the principles of this decision and its long-term implications.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science will visit the RAU in the near future. I will be pleased to accompany him, to show him the important role the institution plays in preparing students for the increasingly important work in agricultural production, the food supply chain and the management of the land on which we all rely. When he visits, I hope we will be able to reassure the university that this Government and their funding council, HEFCE, are committed to ensuring that the work of the last 170 years, which is literally being harvested in the UK and around the world, will continue to be supported in a fair and appropriate way.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Skills for listening to me, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity.

5.11 pm

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** It is a pleasure to answer this debate on behalf of the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) cares passionately about the subject, and rightly so, because the Royal Agricultural University is a fine, ancient and distinguished institution. It is an adornment to his constituency and he is one of its former pupils, so he is right to represent it as passionately as he does.

[Nick Boles]

I know that my hon. Friend will agree that the United Kingdom's university sector is one of the glories of our education system. It is respected and admired around the world. It has within it ancient and modern institutions, very large universities and very small specialist universities. It is not the size of an institution that determines its repute, but its quality, and the quality of the RAU is undisputed. It is admired and known around the world. There are farmers in Africa and estate managers in south America who will share stories of what they learned when they were at the Royal Agricultural University. My hon. Friend is, therefore, absolutely right to say that this is an institution that deserves the full support of everyone in Government who is involved in supporting higher education.

My hon. Friend also knows, however, that one of the key ingredients in the creation of a university sector that is as admired as ours is its independence, by which I mean not just the independence of the individual institutions, but that of the funding council that grants them public money. He was right to recognise that it is, therefore, a very important principle that Ministers do not intervene in the individual decisions that HEFCE makes about specific grants to specific institutions. Nevertheless, he is also right to say that Ministers do have a role in setting the policies and giving guidance and advice to HEFCE, through grant letters, on how it should make those decisions about funding for individual institutions.

My hon. Friend was right to quote what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to HEFCE in July 2015, but I will repeat it. He asked it to protect as far as possible the funding for a range of things, including "small and specialist institutions". Whether or not it meets the criteria of the new formula, the Royal Agricultural University is unquestionably both small and specialist, and it is very important that it is treated fairly.

I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for pointing out that although the proposed withdrawal of the grant would represent a very significant drop—he cited a figure of 56%—in the funding of the Royal Agricultural University, it is important for the House to understand and for the record to show that, as a percentage of its overall income, the fall will be 8%. That is significant, and no institution wants to lose 8% of its income—it certainly does not want to lose it if it does not believe that it is being treated fairly—but, to put that into context, it is important that the House understands that it is losing not 56% of its total income under the proposal, but 56% of its grant funding.

Nevertheless, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to argue that it is important that there is a level playing field and that HEFCE does everything it can to ensure that similar institutions offering similar courses are treated—shall I say?—similarly, and that no institution is singled out. Although, as I am not the Minister with responsibility for this subject, I am certainly not sufficiently expert to judge on the question of the coding of particular courses, I think it is very important for HEFCE—and HEFCE will itself want everybody to believe this—to be scrupulously fair in its decision and that no perversities arising from historical decisions about coding and the like have led to its decision. He is right to point to natural justice as an important set of principles that any institution doling out the public's money on behalf of the public should very much take to heart.

I wanted to quarrel with just one thing that my hon. Friend said. He seemed to think that the man or woman on the Clapham omnibus would have a view. I have to say that Clapham is not perhaps a place in which people have a close and intense understanding of the important work done by the Royal Agricultural University. I can assure him, however, that in the Grantham omnibus or the Stamford omnibus—or, indeed, in those in the constituency of my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), in Devon—there is a great deal of familiarity with its work and a great deal of sympathy for his arguments.

I will conclude by taking this opportunity at the Dispatch Box—not as the responsible Minister, but on behalf of my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science—simply to ask HEFCE to do all it can to ensure that no institution faces a disproportionate funding reduction and to avoid any threats in the short term to institutional viability. In asking it to do so, we do not seek to interfere in its independence or require it to make a different decision from the one it has set out, but simply to ensure that the principles of natural justice are indeed adhered to.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for what he is saying. He is being very helpful. May I take it from what he is saying that, as a result of this debate, he would expect HEFCE to enter into further discussions with the RAU authorities to see how the coding of the courses works and whether the 60% figure on which it made this arbitrary decision can be reviewed?

**Nick Boles:** I understand that HEFCE is already having discussions with the university about the consequences and implications of the funding cut. I am sure that those will continue and provide an opportunity for all parties to review whether the decision was taken on the basis of a fair assessment of the respective institutions' activities. Those discussions will also allow the parties to reflect on whether removing 56% of anything is proportionate, when compared with other examples.

I do not want to go further than that because it is ultimately for HEFCE to make these determinations. However, I know that, as a fine institution at the heart of one of the world's greatest university sectors, it will want everyone always to see that it is fair and impartial and that it does everything it can to support quality institutions.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** It seems to me and to the RAU, my constituent institution, that ruling it out of the bidding process altogether is completely unfair. Nobody would object if it could make a bid and put forward a case comparable to those of its rival institutions, but not to allow it even to make the case is pretty unreasonable and contrary to all the rules of natural justice.

**Nick Boles:** My hon. Friend has made that point eloquently. I would not want to comment on the processes that led up to the decision, but it is important that justice is done and that it is seen to be done. I know that he will go on fighting vigorously for this institution until he is satisfied that that is the case.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.21 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 26 November 2015

[ANDREW PERCY *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### North-East Devolution

1.30 pm

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the north-east devolution deal.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I welcome the opportunity to debate these matters. We do not often get a chance to debate English regional development, so I express my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating today's discussion.

The north-east devolution deal is the latest initiative as part of the Government's proposed devolution agenda, which is the mechanism by which they hope to drive local economic development. As I said, we do not often get a chance to debate these matters in the House, so I want not only to focus on the deal itself, but to consider it in the context of the Government's wider regional economic development strategy, such as it is.

The recent signing of the devolution deal for the north-east of England makes now the right time to look at the record of the coalition Government and, more recently, the Conservative-majority Government on economic development in the north-east of England, as well as considering the likely impact of the terms of the deal.

It is claimed that the north-east devolution deal will give the north-east more control over areas such as transport, skills and business support. The deal imposes on the region a directly elected Mayor, who will be chiefly responsible for transport arrangements. The Mayor will be a member of the North East Combined Authority, with each of the local authority representatives holding a specific cabinet post. The combined authority will have responsibility for a North East Combined Authority investment fund, a seat on an employment and skills board designed to review and redesign post-16 education and skills policy, and responsibilities relating to business support, connectivity and rural growth. A review body is also to be set up with Government to consider the possibility of devolution of health services at a future date. There are outstanding issues—that is probably the best way to put it, Mr Percy—in relation to police governance and the three fire authorities.

Devolution must have a purpose. It should be seen as a means to an end. My concern is that, under this Government, devolution has come to be seen as an end in itself. We must ask ourselves why we are devolving certain powers and how devolving such powers helps to meet our core objectives—in the north-east's case, economic development. We talk a lot about the principle of devolution, which I am not philosophically opposed to, but we must also bear it in mind that decisions should

be made at the most appropriate level. My concern about the Conservative Government's approach to devolution is that where they devolve responsibility for a problem, there is no devolution of the capacity and necessary resources to tackle it. They essentially want to take Government out of the equation. Despite all the local initiatives and structures put in place, central Government remain the most powerful and influential agent in driving forward economic development and change. Government can be a force for good and should not take a back seat on regional issues.

The north-east has a range of needs. However, our overwhelming priority is, and has been for many years, the need to broaden, deepen and strengthen the private sector employment base in the region. Our unemployment rate is 8.6% and has so far increased throughout 2015; the national average is 5.3%. We have a historical structural gap in jobs. The region is calculated to need an extra 60,000 jobs to bring it in line with the rest of the country; that is a key objective for economic development strategies in the region. Consequently, our employment rate is below the national average. Our gross value added levels per head are just 74% of the English average, and addressing productivity is another key challenge for the region. Skills, employability and training is the third key challenge for the north-east. We have a higher inactive proportion of the working-age population than the rest of the country, and we need to build the skill levels of our young people if local youngsters are to fill the high-quality jobs that we want for the region.

Finally, the region suffers from an imbalance in infrastructure spend. Planned infrastructure spending per head is £3,386 in London; the figure per head for the north-east is £539. Even a modest redistribution would help to make big improvements to the north-east's transport infrastructure and connectivity.

None of the issues that I have set out is new. They have been mentioned in every economic development initiative for the last decade, from the regional development agency, the North East local enterprise partnership's economic review, the strategic economic plan for the region, the city deals agreed with local authorities in the region and in this latest devolution agreement. However, we are not making much progress towards achieving the objectives.

Real progress was achieved under the last Labour Government. From 1998 to 2008, employment in the region increased by 67,000—a 10% increase. By its own measure, the North East local enterprise partnership has stated that the jobs gap, historically estimated at 60,000 in the north-east, has reduced during the five and a half years of Conservative-led government to 58,900. The gap is simply not closing, and it does not give me great confidence that the local enterprise partnership has struggled for more than a year to appoint a chief executive. If it cannot fill one job, how can it be expected to oversee the creation of 60,000?

Regional productivity saw a 10% increase, compared with the England average, in the course of the last Labour Government. It has remained broadly static since 2010 and below the levels seen in the mid-2000s.

On skills and apprenticeships, a recent report for the North East Combined Authority branded the region's target of doubling the number of apprenticeships "unachievable". It reported a 33% decline in apprenticeship

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starts for 16 to 19-year-olds and a 42% drop in apprenticeships for those aged 19-plus. Those are declines of nearly 3,000 and 4,000 apprenticeships respectively in the north-east alone. The report also points to a growing skills gap in engineering and advanced manufacturing, while there is a lack of apprenticeship and training opportunities in the IT and digital sector, business and creative and cultural industries.

On infrastructure investment, the north-east receives just 16% of the funding per head that London gets. On transport funding, for every £520 spent per head in London, just £1 is spent in the north-east. We do not get our fair share, yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer cites infrastructure and transport as a core plank of the northern powerhouse plan. The north-east does not stand to benefit from the High Speed 2 scheme and could well face a reduced service if slower services are routed up the east coast main line.

The north-east has some of the most profitable bus routes in the country, and the old integrated transport board—that was the joint board set up after the abolition of Tyne and Wear County Council—quite reasonably was trying to improve services for customers. The proposed quality contract scheme, subsequently taken up by the North East Combined Authority, has been thwarted by a Government agency, citing concerns about the impact on profits for the large bus companies.

The Chancellor cites integrated, smart-ticketed transport networks as part of the way forward for northern regions, yet his own Government agencies are preventing that from happening. The north-east is only trying to implement what already exists in London. Why do we face opposition from the Government?

On economic development, the Government's rhetoric simply does not match the reality on the ground in the north-east. Progress has been slow, minimal or non-existent. The momentum built up during the years of the Labour Government was lost in the misguided abolition of the regional development agencies and the resultant scramble of schemes and initiatives.

There is a strong case for having an intervention policy to deal with the problems faced by the region, led by Government and overseen by a Minister. For the avoidance of doubt, let me say that I think the present Minister would be a perfectly acceptable person to oversee such arrangements. The region needs serious, comprehensive, Government-led economic development, not a series of tinkering interventions dressed up as local government reform and badged as the new localism—without any say, incidentally, from the people of the north-east.

It is my contention that the coalition Government were wrong to abolish RDAs. If they wanted to reduce the agencies' budget or scope, they could have done so while leaving the agencies' core function of regional economic development in place. Since then, we have seen a plethora of initiatives designed to replace the RDAs and give the impression of a flurry of Government activity. Local enterprise partnerships were the coalition Government's intended replacement for RDAs. LEPs were supposed to be the bodies that would drive forward economic development. They are, however, ill-defined and ill-equipped to tackle the problems we face in the north-east.

The Government's city deal initiative was promoted aside from the LEPs and their enterprise zones. The regional growth fund was held centrally and its use decided in Whitehall. Lucky bidders were awarded allocations, and even luckier ones actually received the money. We have not heard much about the regional growth fund since May this year.

Alongside the regional growth fund—the responsibility of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—we had the creation of local growth deals, which seemed to be the competitor funds from the Department for Communities and Local Government, and which were announced with great fanfare in June 2014. A year later, however, mention of them seems to have ceased. The last press statement on the Government's website about local growth deals was in January.

Now, the Government's repackaged initiative is devolution deals, which build on the forced creation around the country of combined authorities—another wonky plank in the Government's haphazard regional economic development platform. The Government's regional economic development policy is unfocused, incoherent and unclear about what it is designed to achieve. I am not sure that it can be properly defined as a policy programme; rather, it is a series of confused, overlapping and disjointed attempts to portray the image of a Government spreading money around the country.

The Government have focused relentlessly on constantly changing and churning structures and the process by which that happens, to the extent that a concrete outcome is a distant afterthought. It is a tragedy for the north-east that we have wasted five and a half years so far arguing about structures and territorial delineations between the various bodies when the Government should have been driving forward a comprehensive economic development strategy.

I fear that the north-east deal is just the latest initiative in the Government's disjointed regional economic development programme. There are concerns about the proposed governance structures, chiefly the imposition of a Mayor on the region. Whatever they say in public, the Government clearly made that a precondition for the granting of further powers. In much the same way as with the principle of devolution, little consideration has been given to whether a directly elected Mayor, or indeed a combined authority, is the most suitable way to tackle the stated problems that the north-east faces.

The region rejected the regional assembly proposition in 2004, and Newcastle rejected the idea of an elected Mayor for the city in 2012, but both structures have been imposed on us by Government. It would not be unreasonable to let the people of the north-east have a say about all that in a referendum. I note that Durham County Council is drawing up plans to let its residents do so, and I welcome that. I hope that other residents in the north-east will have a similar opportunity to vote on these proposals before they are enacted.

The Government's intention in imposing a directly elected Mayor is to have a single figurehead who can drive forward the region's priorities. However, the nature of the governance structures means that that simply will not be the case. The Mayor is essentially just an additional member of the combined authority, with decisions requiring a majority vote from the north-east council leaders, as well as being subject to a two-thirds veto. This looks very much like just another opportunity for gridlock and division.

I have concerns about the accountability and scrutiny arrangements for the Government's devolution plans. Our RDA had a mixture of private sector, political opposition and governing party membership, and we—the then Labour Government—made sure that that was the case. The scrutiny and accountability arrangements under this Government are much weaker.

There are questions about LEP appointments. Do they really conform to Nolan principles? How will the Mayor and combined authority members be held accountable to the north-east as a whole? What role is there for opposition parties to hold such figures to account?

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share the concerns of Mick Henry, the leader of Gateshead Council, about the fact that the chair of the North East LEP has been appointed to the board of a company run by a senior Conservative in the region? There does not seem to be any transparency of the sort that would be expected for normal appointments.

**Mr Brown:** The concerns that my hon. Friend raises are widely shared throughout public life in the north-east of England, and I share the concerns that the leader of Gateshead Council has expressed. The potential overlap between public service and private interest seems to me to be too great. I cannot see how that can truly be said to be in conformity with the Nolan principles that I referred to earlier. Indeed, I have my doubts about whether any of the original appointments to the LEP board were truly in conformity with Nolan principles, and I know of no evidence that a Nolan-style procedure was followed in the making of those appointments.

Before my hon. Friend's intervention, I was expressing my anxiety about the fact that opposition parties in the region are finding it difficult to hold any of those figures to account in any practical way. It is worth pointing out that the joint boards, which were the successors to the old Tyne and Wear county arrangements, contained a precise mixture of governing party and opposition party representatives. It is one of the great ironies of debates such as this, that I am calling, as an Opposition Member, for the proper representation of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, and the Conservative Government are resisting that, preferring a one-party arrangement made up solely of Labour politicians.

The details are not clear, and yet we are being asked at every stage to agree to these new structures without all the information. I have tried to tease the answers out of the Government through parliamentary questions, so it is not through want of trying. However, I have not really managed to extract any further detail, so we are left to assume that the Government do not know or that they have not decided yet.

The Government appear to intend—just in case anyone gets the impression that they are completely walking away from all this—to maintain a close involvement and a say in the workings and decisions of the new structures without accepting any responsibility for them. The proposed employment and skills board has no less than five Government representatives on it, from BIS, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions, and, separately, the Treasury. It is being chaired by a Minister, and—this is the great concession to the new localism—there will be a representative of the combined authority.

The Government propose to maintain joint responsibility on issues such as inward investment, proposals for a science and innovation unit and broadband roll-out, as well as keeping a say in the health and social care integration commission, the integration of transport services and any further devolution—no decision has been made on this yet—for the Tyne and Wear metro and the Northern and TransPennine rail franchises.

The Government talk enthusiastically about devolving power. However, it seems that they are less keen on letting go of the levers. They are not devolving the money or the exercise of control, just the responsibility. Uncertainty remains over the future relationship of the mayor and the combined authority in relation to the local enterprise partnership and other regional structures. Only this week, local press have reported of in-fighting and turf wars between these organisations, and that is to be expected when the Government's structures and responsibilities are so poorly defined.

In the deal, vague statements are made about police and fire services. Are they to come under the control of the mayor or the combined authority? Are the different police force areas covering the north-east to be merged? What, then, would happen to the commissioners? They are another example of the Government's pursuit of single figureheads that have been subsumed in devolution deals—in Manchester, for example. The deal needs to be seen in the wide political context facing the region.

Just yesterday, we heard the Chancellor's spending review announcement, which includes cuts of 30% to the budget of the Department for Communities and Local Government and a 37% cut to the Department for Transport. Whatever the Chancellor is proposing to give the north-east in his devolution deal with one hand, he is doubly taking away with the other in the form of cuts to local councils and their services. It is estimated that local councils in the north-east will no longer even be able to fund statutory services, let alone other services, within the next few years. His 2% rate rise proposal will simply not fill the gap.

In Newcastle, the city that I have the honour and privilege to represent, the 2% rate increase would raise just over £1 million, which would leave an anticipated shortfall of £15 million a year in the adult care budget. The Chancellor's business rates proposal will make matters much worse. North-east councils simply cannot raise the revenue locally. Our council tax is a much smaller proportion of the total council revenue on residential properties, largely because of the high number of lower-band properties.

The proposal would require large increases in the business rate—bidden by the Chancellor—to plug the gap left by the removal of the central Government grant. Removing the local government grant also removes the redistributive element of local government finance. Therefore, more prosperous local authorities can see why this might be a reasonable policy to pursue, but those who rely on the redistributive element because they are poorer and have more demand for the statutory services that they have to provide are obviously looking at this with considerable concern.

Different council areas can raise significantly different amounts of money from local taxation. A 1% council tax or business rate rise in parts of London can raise tens of millions of pounds. The equivalent 1% council tax rise in Newcastle would not even raise £1 million.

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Any commitment in devolution deals to a “fair funding settlement”—to quote the Government—are completely worthless against this proposal. It is an unfair and deeply divisive proposition. The Government need to look at it again urgently before proceeding any further.

Economies gravitate towards their centre and it is a core duty of the Government to push back against that through focused regional policy. This would also have the effect of tackling congestion and overheating in the centre as well as strengthening the economic base of the rest of the country. It does, however, require a determined lead from Government, not a parcelling out of responsibilities to local authority leadership boards without the capacity to tackle the problem adequately.

The Chancellor’s northern powerhouse initiative is ostensibly his attempt to redress the balance between London and the south-east, and the north of England. As we have seen with the initiatives that preceded it, the reality does not match the rhetoric. The Government call for a “New pan-northern approach”, harnessing the endeavours of 15 million people to create

“a new scale of activity and rival the best trade centres in Europe”,

making it

“one of the easiest places in the world to do business”

with “transformative transport interventions”.

However, in their official answers, the Government cannot tell us where the northern powerhouse is. They delay our rail projects, refuse to intervene to save highly-skilled manufacturing jobs in northern steelworks, and beg the Chinese to invest in the north, so the Government do not have to. There was one shimmer of hope in the spending review, however. Buried away in a footnote on page 10, it states:

“The north is defined as the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber regions.”

I am still not entirely sure that that means they know what turf their powerhouse concept occupies, but it is a step forward.

Yesterday’s spending review sets all this in context. The business rate changes will further impoverish local government in the north-east. The elected mayor will be hobbled by the governance structures of the combined authority and the lingering hand of Government. The region will undoubtedly take more than its fair share of cuts in Transport funding and Communities and Local Government funding. Overshadowing all that is the ending of the redistributive element of central Government support for local government.

The more that the details of the proposal are examined, the weaker the case for it becomes. At the very least, the north-east should be allowed to vote on the proposals in a referendum. Ideally, the Government would have accepted their responsibilities and had the comprehensive, regional intervention that the north-east so badly needs.

1.56 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. The Government started in 2010 from completely the opposite position to where they are now. It was very much an anti-regional agenda. In response to anything that had

“region” before it, the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) would say that the Government did not actually believe in regions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) outlined, we saw the abolition of the regional development agency and of the Government office for the north-east—the only Government office that co-ordinated events and activity from central Government. They were replaced by local enterprise partnerships, which I think were initially an idea of the Liberal Democrats.

What did we do in the north-east, which is a small region of only 2 million people? We stuck an artificial dividing line in the region, creating two LEPs. I accept the argument that the Tees Valley LEP is working possibly more effectively than the north-east one. North East LEP, as my right hon. Friend just outlined, has been a complete and absolute failure. It has lacked leadership and has had more policy documents and initiatives than any organisation I have seen. It has led not to the clear decision making that we would expect in setting out what economic development is needed for the region, but to an agenda that pitches business against the local authorities. That is not being done by accident; it is being conducted in a most aggressive way by a very good friend of the Chancellor—Mr Jeremy Middleton. Now, we have ended up with the inertia we have described.

Let us remember that the Government came from the position of the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar arguing that regions do not exist. Now, they are saying that there has been some kind of damascene conversion—that the Tory party is now in favour of maximum devolution not only of resources, but of decision making. That clearly is not the case. What we actually have in the devolution agenda is what we saw yesterday. The Government’s real policy—it is certainly that of the Chancellor—is a small-state Britain, where they shrink the state to be as small as possible. Many of the things that we and many of our constituents would think are proper functions of the state are at the mercy of his axe. He is also a coward in respect of not being able to take responsibility for those cuts, because, with the devolution agenda for the north-east, he will devolve limited responsibilities but none of the resources to go with them, which is one of the major problems. If it was true devolution, it would need the resources to go with it, but it is not true devolution. Central Government will keep a tight hold on the purse strings and will centrally cut budgets as they wish to meet their targets, and local politicians will be blamed for the tough decisions that they have to take.

One classic example of that is skills and post-16 education, which we learned yesterday will face cuts—there is talk of reorganisation in the region. That was one of the key things in the devolution settlement for the north-east. We all know what that will mean in practice: the budgets will be devolved locally. I have no problem with decisions on skills and other issues being taken in the region, but what will happen is that the budgets will be cut, while they are being devolved, which will leave the combined authority, local council leaders and others to make the decision to close and reorganise further education colleges. When people rightly complain about their local FE college being closed or merged, the Chancellor will be able to say, “It’s not me, gov; it’s your Labour council leader’s responsibility.”

If we were having a serious debate about devolution, we would have had a far clearer, worked-out policy and a debate within the region. Frankly, the debate in the region has been pathetic. Devolution has been sold by some of its proponents as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the region, as though it is akin to selling sofas or other bargains in the Christmas sales, but if people ask questions about it, they are treated as though they are somehow anti the region or anti-business and are holding back the region, which I find insulting. Those individual councils and others who oppose the devolution settlement and the mayoral system that, whatever the Government say, has been imposed as part of the deal have a great track record of working closely with business in the north-east; they are not anti-business.

My council in County Durham has worked closely with business, and just two recent successes are the attraction of Hitachi to Newton Aycliffe, which could not have been done without Durham County Council championing it very hard, and the County Durham plan, a far-reaching economic plan for prosperity. The plan was drawn up with local businesses to consider County Durham's future. I take great exception to individuals, including Mr Middleton and others in the Conservative party, who badge themselves as business people but always somehow forget to say that the agenda is being pushed by the Conservative party. Somehow, they say that Labour councils in the north-east are anti-business, but we have a great track record: councils took a key role in attracting Nissan. Before the regional development agency, we had the Northern Development Company, a pioneering partnership between local Labour councils, business and trade unions that played an active part in attracting Nissan to the north-east. I want to knock on the head this idea that people who question devolution are somehow anti-business.

The devolution deal needs to be looked at more closely. As I have said, a lot of responsibility is being offered without the resources to go with it. One of the key points is that we will get an extra £30 million a year over 30 years and the combined authority will get the ability to bid for additional resources, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East said, we need to put that in context. Taking the current consultation on public health as an example, the suggested formula means that County Durham alone will lose £20 million a year. With the reductions in local government budgets over the next few years, £30 million is, frankly, a drop in the ocean.

We heard announcements yesterday about social care and education funding and other such things, and I have heard it said by Conservative Ministers that, somehow, everywhere in the country is equal in how it should get resources. That is why the Government want to do away with the revenue support grant. The poorest areas have the biggest demands, and they will end up having to continue to meet those statutory requirements without the resources to do so, while we have the ludicrous situation in which the budgets of wealthier councils in the south-east and other parts of the country will be increased. It is no coincidence that those councils are controlled by the Conservatives.

The other thing that was championed yesterday, and I said that it was nonsense when Lord Adonis mentioned it, is the idea of 100% collection of business rates. Again, that will hinder the amount of cash that councils in the north-east will be able to get because County Durham,

for example, will not see huge growth in business rates compared with, say, the City of Westminster or somewhere else. Added to that is the situation that we have seen over the past few months in Redcar, which has lost some £11 million a year from the steel industry, one of its major business rate payers. In Committee, I asked what the mechanism is for councils to replace the business rates of a large employer or other such entity that goes bust or moves away. Not surprisingly, I got no answer.

The funding formula for fire services and the police is, again, moving resources from the north-east. The £30 million a year suggested in the devolution deal, which is supposed to be a giveaway and a great opportunity for the north-east, is a trifling amount over 30 years. As my right hon. Friend said, the sum should be seen in the context of the former regional development agency's budget to invest in local business. We have to ensure that the proposals are joined up; my concern is that this is not a joined-up approach. I am still not clear on what extra resources or powers will be given to the mayor or the north-east authority that will make the real difference that we need.

The mayor was imposed on the region, no matter what the Minister says. The arguments were put when the council leaders met the Secretary of State. Every single time they asked whether they could have a deal without a mayor, the response they got was, "No, George wants a mayor." The Chancellor wants an elected mayor. There is a notion that if we have one individual, they will somehow drive economic development, but I ask people to look at the track record of development in the north-east, in Newcastle and on Tyneside and Teesside. I was part of that when I was on Newcastle City Council, and much of it is driven not by one dynamic individual but by the old committee system and by the council working closely with business to get investment, thereby ensuring jobs and prosperity.

One of the best examples is Newcastle airport. The council part-own the enterprise, of which I was proud to be a director, but its resources were stymied when the Conservatives were last in government because they would not allow the airport authority to borrow money to invest. It was only through the good practice of councils and the airport board in reinvesting the resources developed that the airport could expand and then go into partnership with the private sector, which has made the airport not only an important gateway for the region in terms of exports and individual travel but a huge economic powerhouse in creating jobs and prosperity. There is a track record and willingness, but the Government's approach is that that is not important: "We've got to have control still, and if you don't have what we're proposing, you're backward-looking and negative." That is not the north-east that I know.

The other issue involves the mayor's role. I have asked the Minister in written questions what the mayor will cost in terms of the budget. How much will it cost to run his office, for example? How much will the election cost? The reply was that he did not know, and that it was down to local councils to decide. Again, if the Government are proposing a major change in the structure of local or regional government, some of those basic questions should have been answered first.

We come back to my right hon. Friend's point about the role of the people. In 2004, we put a proposal for regional government to the people of the north-east,

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which I think was the right decision. If we had not done that but just imposed a new regional structure, as the present Government are doing, there would have been clear outrage, not just among the public but from the same voices in the Conservative party in the north-east who are now talking about the importance of an elected mayor. There is a basic question here about asking local people and involving them in the process. I am pleased that County Durham is undertaking a consultation exercise and asking people directly, in a vote, whether they want to be part of the process, because that deals with a fundamental weakness.

My right hon. Friend asked other questions about the mayor's role and how scrutiny will be conducted in practice. If we are to move forward with devolution, not just in the north-east but elsewhere, it must be at least thought out in practice. I do not think that this scheme has been thought out at all. In Committee of the whole House, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) compared the Secretary of State to a modern-day Chamberlain figure in terms of his reform of local government. This is nothing of the sort. This is a clear, well-thought-out plan by the Chancellor to cut budgets centrally and push the blame downward to local level, where local authorities will have to take hard decisions.

The north-east has a lot of strengths; its main strength is its people. During the blasting and butchery of industries there, did they sit back? No, they did not. They adapted. They ensured that the region changed its focus in terms of jobs, the service sector, tourism and other industries. That was supported by Labour local authorities, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend in his role as the Minister for the north-east under the last Government.

What is needed for the north-east? It is clear: we need investment, and some of the big investment infrastructure decisions involve things such as transport. If the Government were suggesting that we would get a larger slice of the national pie for transport infrastructure, to be decided locally, that would be fine, but they are not. What has happened in transport over the past five years is that the north-east's share has been cut by 13%, compared with only 8% in the south-east of England. If we had an agreed position on some of the major transport issues that need to be addressed in our region, it could make a difference, not just by making the region more interconnected but by attracting business, skills and jobs.

We now have an artificial dividing line through the region, however, and it will be even worse once we have two mayors. In my constituency of North Durham, people travel both north to Tyneside and to Teesside to work. The idea that an artificial line across this small region is needed for decision making will seem bizarre to them. If we are to have a joined-up public transport system, for example, how that works in practice will be interesting. Will one half of the A1 be governed by the mayor for the north-east and the other half governed by the mayor for Teesside? There are many practical questions that would have been addressed if we had had a good debate and come to a proper policy decision, but we have not. The scheme has been thought up by the Conservative party not to benefit the north-east but for clear political reasons.

On the way forward, if people in Durham ask me, "Is this good for Durham and the north-east?" I will say, "No, it is not," and I will argue that they should vote no strongly to the proposals. My right hon. Friend made another point about how other councils address the issue. They should ask people directly whether they want to sign up to the proposal, in case they think that they are being excluded. That was the policy under the last Government—we heard a lot about localism and asking local people—but it is not the policy under this one; it is the last thing that the new Conservative Government are doing. That was clearly baggage from the days of the Liberal Democrat coalition, because now, irrespective of what Ministers and others say, the deal is just being imposed. It was put to the council leaders, who were told to take it or leave it. If they did not take it, they would get no deal and no resources, and the chorus of Conservative-backed interests in the north-east would say that Labour councils were holding back the development of the north-east. That could not be further from the truth, as shown by the record that I have outlined of working closely with the Government.

This is not good news for the north-east. What was announced yesterday, as my right hon. Friend said, will be worse news for how local councils function, given the reduced budgets that they will get. I fear that some councils in the north-east might fall over completely, financially speaking, because of what is coming down the track. I fear that we will not be able to take care of the most vulnerable—the elderly, whom we would expect to be able to take care of in a decent, caring society—because of the funding gap created by the proposals announced yesterday.

I do not think that this is a bright solution for the north-east of England. What we need and what I would have expected from the Minister and possibly some of those arguing for an elected mayor, who never seem to criticise the Government for the vicious cuts that they have implemented in the north-east rather than in the southern Tory shires, is for them to make a case to the Government for increased spending directed at those areas where people need it, rather than coming up with a structure that might ultimately, as my right hon. Friend said, involve a lot of time and effort, and a lot of newsprint and hot air. Will it make a difference to the north-east by ensuring the lives and prosperity that we all want there? No, I do not think that it will.

**Andrew Percy (in the Chair):** There is nobody else trying to catch my eye, so we will move to the shadow Minister, Steve Reed.

2.19 pm

**Mr Steve Reed** (Croydon North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy.

I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) on securing this important debate about the devolution deal on offer to the north-east. It is very important that such deals are subject to scrutiny, and one of the problems in the way that they have been put together is that the Government have not appeared to be as keen as they should be on exposing them to a level of scrutiny that can maximise the benefits from the deals that are being negotiated.

That said, devolution is a Labour agenda. It is being led by Labour in local government, and I am pleased that my right hon. Friend said that he was not philosophically opposed to deals of this kind, because this is the most over-centralised country in the western industrial world, and we need to get powers out of Whitehall. Decisions taken as close as possible to the people who are affected by them will be better decisions, because those people have a vital and urgent interest in making those decisions work as well as they can for the local community that they are part of. However, what the Government are offering is not living up to the full expectations or potential of devolution if it was delivered in that way.

In my view, the Government are too cautious and too slow, and offering too little to our great cities and regions, and they are doing that because they are simply afraid to let go. We have heard examples of that from my two colleagues who have spoken in this debate—my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). Those examples show that the Government are either failing to devolve powers that should be devolved or they are trying to devolve responsibilities without providing the resources necessary to deliver them properly, which threatens to undermine the integrity of some of these devolution deals.

The Government have no real commitment to devolution. They are offering some devolution with one hand. However, and I have made this point to the Minister before, his colleagues on the Front Bench and in the Cabinet are busily centralising, doing the polar opposite of what the Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government are doing when they talk so eloquently and supportively about devolution.

The Housing and Planning Bill is currently going through Parliament and comes from the same departmental team as the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. It contains more than 30 measures that are centralising powers, taking powers away from local communities and concentrating them in the hands of Secretaries of State here in Whitehall. The same ministerial team cannot claim to support devolution while they are also promoting a Bill that actively centralises powers, taking them away from the communities that they claim they are trying to devolve powers to.

The sell-off of social housing comes at a time when millions of people across the country are desperately in need of affordable homes. The Government are forcing those localities, even if they want to provide more social and affordable houses, to sell off social housing, whether or not they want to. That is a centralised diktat to local people; it is not devolution.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** The other thing that is being centrally imposed is the rent cap of 1%. In my own constituency, that has led to two housing associations not only having to cut back their existing programme but having to question deals that they have already entered into for the building of new housing.

**Mr Reed:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because the truth is that we see the same kind of thing time and time again. The rhetoric says one thing, but the action is the polar opposite. The Government are not really interested in decentralising

or devolving anything that they themselves want to control, and they want to control and hold the power for themselves here at the centre.

My hon. Friend referred earlier to post-16 skills, which is another excellent example of where devolution would massively improve the efficiency and effectiveness of those services, but I am afraid that Conservative Ministers just refuse to let go.

The Work programme is another example. It was designed and constructed here in Whitehall without the involvement or engagement of local communities, local councils, or local democratically elected representatives. That is one of the reasons why it is floundering. The Government refuse to let go and things do not work.

I will use free schools as a final example of how the Government are centralising things. They are trying to set up schools from Whitehall, with no understanding of local communities, no involvement of local communities in deciding where the schools should be located, and no accountability to local communities about those schools, because the schools are all being controlled from the centre. That is one of the reasons why we are seeing some free schools fail to perform as well as they could. If the Government would only trust local communities in the way that they say they want to, they would find that that approach worked, and I wish the Minister would sometimes go and talk to his colleagues, and persuade them of the case in the way that he likes to try to persuade us of a commitment to devolution. Actually, we already share that commitment, but his party colleagues have refused again and again to understand and accept it.

My hon. Friends referred to unfair funding, particularly in the north-east, although it is not the only region that is affected by unfair funding. We heard some shocking examples about how the north-east is being stitched up in terms of funding. It is at a dreadful funding disadvantage relative to other, better-off parts of the country, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East referred in particular to the appalling share of infrastructure spend that it receives. There is little point in the Government devolving decision making about infrastructure to a region if they are not going to allow it access to the resources that it needs to make decisions that can actually make a difference to the lives of people in that region.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by that situation, because in recent years under this Government the 10 poorest local authority areas have received cuts 18 times greater than the 10 wealthiest local authority areas. Time and time again the Government hit the poorest areas the hardest. In many of our inner urban areas, we have very poor and very deprived communities; it is not only in inner urban areas that we have such communities, but in many cases communities in inner urban areas are very poor. These are the areas that are in the lead on devolution, but my fear is that if desperately unfair funding settlements continue to be offered to those areas that are taking devolution, we will be setting them up to fail and undermining devolution. The Government are undermining devolution in the way that they are going about it.

My hon. Friends have also said, and they were absolutely right to do so, that one of the things at the back of the Government's mind on this issue is that they want to devolve the blame for cuts being made in Whitehall and

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they think devolution is a cunning ruse to shift the blame on to Labour councils that are doing their best to protect communities from the effects of an unfair set of decisions which, on the whole, are taken in No. 11 Downing Street but, sadly, are peddled by other Ministers in other departmental teams in the Government.

Just yesterday, we heard that there would be a 56% cut in the revenue support grant, and no information was given about any equalisation measures that might be introduced to accompany the localisation of the business rate. Without that information, local areas cannot plan, and we can only fear—given what we have seen during the last six years—that what has already been a desperately unfair approach to sharing out funding around the country will get significantly worse, and significantly less fair. We were promised that we would see the equalisation mechanism at the time of the autumn statement. The autumn statement was made yesterday, but we have not been given any clarity about what that mechanism might be.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham also referred to the Government's decision to make devolution deals in urban areas contingent on the imposition of a Mayor, even if they do not want a Mayor. I have heard the Minister say before that the Government are not imposing Mayors because local areas do not have to accept a Mayor if they do not want the devolution deal, but that is absolutely unfair on areas that would like to take devolution, and would like to go a lot further than the Minister is prepared to go, but do not necessarily want a Mayor as part of that offer. Surely, if we believe in devolution, we should allow areas to choose the governance model that best suits them, and they should be allowed to use that model for themselves; a model should not be imposed by Ministers here in Whitehall.

Also, far too often these devolution deals are made behind closed doors. We heard calls from my hon. Friends this afternoon, and I have heard them from many Labour MPs and many leaders and members of communities, to be part of these deals as they are being put together. They want to be able to influence them. Businesses, community organisations, public service users—all the people living in the communities that would be affected by devolution deals want to be able to influence and shape them. However, time and time again the Government insist that the deals will be done behind closed doors and then offered to a locality only once they have been signed off by the Government themselves.

In my view, taking decisions in a more open and transparent way makes those decisions better. There is more challenge, more creativity and more sources of information and thinking about how those deals can be made to work better, but the Government appear to be afraid of the people. They need to start to learn to trust people, because devolution will not work if the Government are not prepared to trust the communities that will be affected by devolution when those powers are transferred. Labour councils have an absolute duty to get the best deal that they can from the Government of the day, whoever they are. I believe that Labour councils are doing that, but it will never be the best possible deal so long as we have a Government who, despite their fine words about devolution, from their actions appear to be afraid to let go.

2.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) on securing it. I know he has had an interest in regional policy and in regional economic policy in particular for a long time. One way or another, the comments today have covered the past 20 years or so of north-east regional economic policy and the things that Governments of different colours have done to try to support growth in a region that is close to my heart and those of the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

I will touch on a number of the broader topics that have been raised before talking specifically about the points that have been made on the devolution deal that the north-east has struck. First, I challenge the assertion that I have heard so many times in this place about the deal that the north-east gets and the suggestion that we somehow do not get our fair share and that the north-east is somehow treated unfairly. Public sector spending per head in the north-east is higher than in any other English region outside London, and the difference between London and the north-east is marginal at best.

Over the past five years—that period of austerity Government—Opposition Members have stood so often in this place to bemoan the decisions that the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats had to take in government to put right the economic mess that we inherited from 13 years of profligate Labour rule. Taking two authorities at random, in that most challenging of periods, Durham doubled its reserves to something in the region of £214 million and Newcastle doubled its reserves to something in the region of £100 million.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Because of their unitary status, those councils have been able to save money. The fact of the matter is that the budget has been cut by 40%. The reason for the reserves is that the next round of rationalisation will involve redundancies, which have to be paid for. The idea that there is a magic pot of money lying in County Hall in Durham to pay for future services is complete nonsense.

**James Wharton:** I have stood in this place many times and had this discussion many times over. I welcome the steps that Durham County Council has taken to drive efficiency, and I welcome the recognition that local authorities have a responsibility to find value for money and that every penny that government spends, whether local or national, is a penny that we take out of the economy and away from taxpayers. I recognise all those things, but none the less it deserves to be stated on the record that across the period of the last Parliament—a period of austerity—Durham managed to double its reserves by saving £20 million a year. Whatever purposes it might choose to use those reserves for, it is important to put that point on the record, because it is rather at odds with the impression that is sometimes given by these debates and the statements that Opposition Members make.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the Minister give way?

**James Wharton:** I will, but I want to move on from Durham County Council's reserves.

**Mr Jones:** The Minister has to recognise the fact that he is part of a Government who have reduced the budget of Durham County Council by 40%. The council has to make redundancies. How will it pay for them without those reserves?

**James Wharton:** The fact is that over the past five years, Durham County Council has added more than £100 million to its reserves, but the rhetoric here is of a council that one might think did not have a penny to spare. It is welcome that local authorities look to find efficiencies and to spend money carefully. I do not deny that difficult spending decisions have to be taken, but it is right to challenge the assertion by some Members that the sky is about to fall in. That assertion has been made in all but those exact words so many times in this place over the past five years. We should put on record the reality and recognise that the spending power per head of Durham and Newcastle remains as it has for the past five years: significantly higher than the average spending power per head of local authorities across England.

Having put those matters on record, I want to focus on some of the devolution issues at the heart of the debate. We started with discussion of the old regional development agency. I agree with the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East on some things, so he is clever to find an area on which he knows we do not agree. I was never a great supporter of the old RDA. I felt that it did not give Teesside the recognition it deserved. I accept that we disagree about the work of the old RDA, but I continue to be grateful for and pleased by the changes we saw when the local enterprise partnerships were introduced. Having the Tees Valley LEP allows the area to determine its future and to look to co-ordinate with more close local control on where we want our economy to go and what we want it to do.

I accept that there is disagreement about what the structures should look like, but it is important to put on record my support for the decisions that were taken and my ongoing support, particularly for my LEP. My desire is to see all LEPs, including those in the north-east or the rest of the north-east—however one might want to term it—being successful and contributing to and driving economic growth in the north of England and elsewhere.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** Just on the narrow point of the performance of the north-east local enterprise partnership, is the Minister wholly satisfied with the progress it has made so far and how it has been conducting itself?

**James Wharton:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I recognise some of the good work that the north-east LEP has done, and I put on record the Government's gratitude to those from the private sector, local authorities and the public sector who have, through their joint endeavours and contributions, been able to deliver some of the successes that have been enjoyed in the north-east. However, some genuine concerns are being expressed, not least in the regional media, about how that LEP is working. I want to see those matters resolved and to ensure that the private sector voice is retained, is strong and is recognised for the value it can bring. I also want to see the public sector and local authority representation working with that voice to deliver on the shared agenda to grow the economy of the LEP's area.

I clearly recognise some of the great things the LEP has achieved and the good work done by many individuals contributing to it—I thank them for that—but I want to see the problems talked about in the media resolved. We know those problems exist, and I want to see real and lasting recognition of the need for that private sector voice and the cross-sector co-operation to drive forward the economy in the interests of the region.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Does the Minister share my concern that the chair of the north-east LEP has been appointed as the director of another member of the LEP's company? Even if there is nothing wrong with that in terms of transparency, concerns would be expressed if a local councillor was doing that.

**James Wharton:** I have lost count of the number of debates in which I have had the opportunity to discuss a range of issues to do with the north-east with the hon. Gentleman and he has named and targeted an individual Conservative from the region. We should focus on the bigger issue: how we get the LEP to do the best job it can for the communities that Opposition Members represent and for the area. We all want to see the area realise its significant potential. Some of the more party political or partisan comments do not contribute towards making progress in that direction and securing the sort of economic growth we want to see.

Economic growth, of course, is important. It comes in many ways to the heart of the devolution argument and discussion. We want devolution to drive economic growth. We recognise that the potential across the north of England is significant. If we can unlock that potential, it can make an even greater contribution to the UK's economy. If between now and 2030 the northern powerhouse grows its economy at the average rate that the UK economy is predicted to grow, that will add in the region of £40 billion in real terms to our GDP. That will be good for the people who live in the north and good for the UK as a whole. We want to see that delivered. That is something that all parties can agree on. We perhaps differ on some of the detail of how it should be done, but there is agreement to some extent that devolution has a role to play in empowering local decision makers and unlocking economic opportunities.

The economic opportunities in the north-east are significant. We have had mention of Nissan, that great Conservative legacy to the region. We have seen announcement after announcement from Nissan in recent years about its plans for expansion and extending the new lines that it wants to produce. That has a significant impact not only in Sunderland with the direct jobs that it delivers, but through the supply chain in the region and the whole UK. Our region should be proud that Nissan in Sunderland, in our region, makes more cars than Italy. That is a real achievement that speaks to the quality of the workforce, the dedication of the people of the north-east and the things that can be done if companies choose to invest there. It is a great showcase for what the north-east can do.

Along similar lines, the hon. Member for North Durham mentioned Hitachi at Aycliffe, another good news story and a significant investment in the region of just short of 1,000 direct jobs, with 8,000 or so jobs through the supply chain. We want to secure as many of

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those jobs as possible for our local economy and secure the value that the supply chain can deliver for the local communities surrounding that investment.

In the spending review yesterday, it was announced that there would be new enterprise zones across the north-east and Tees Valley areas. There will be significant extensions of zones that exist and new areas will be given enterprise zone status and support. There will be new opportunities to drive our economy and unlock the potential about which I have already spoken.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** I wholly agree with what the Minister says about Nissan and Hitachi; they are very welcome corporate citizens in the region. He is right to give credit for the original Nissan investment to the Government led by Mrs Thatcher, but does he recognise that those great achievements of the private sector working with the Government to invest in the region and create stable and enduring jobs required Mrs Thatcher's Government to take regional policy seriously and take charge of the negotiations and give a political lead, thus stimulating the eventual outcome? The failure of the Government's current structures to get us anywhere near their accepting such responsibilities is my core complaint. So the examples that he cites underpin my argument, not his.

**James Wharton:** I will certainly join the right hon. Gentleman in recognising and praising the excellent work done by Mrs Thatcher's Government in delivering Nissan. The core point that he makes about public and private partnership, with the Government looking at the private sector's needs and working with it to ensure we deliver and secure the investment we want, is important. I suspect that we perhaps have differences in how that should be delivered, which is what I want to deal with when I talk specifically about the devolution deal in the north-east.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** On Nissan, will the Minister also pay tribute to the Labour-run council in Sunderland, which plays a key part in working with other agencies to deliver investment? On the most recent development in relation to Hitachi, Durham County Council, a Labour authority, has played a key role in attracting Hitachi to Newton Aycliffe.

**James Wharton:** The hon. Gentleman's comments underline the point that I have just made in response to the intervention from the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East. Such things are not delivered by a single individual or even a single policy or a single actor, whether national Government, local government or the private sector. It happens occasionally, but they are often delivered by collaboration and the recognition that we can put aside things on which we disagree, so that we can focus on something of broader benefit that we all want to deliver.

Devolution takes us further along the path. It gives the north-east the opportunity to hold closer to it the powers and levers that will enable it to unlock the economic potential. Devolution does not work by taking powers away from local authorities. I have been keen to stress that message during the progress of the Cities and

Local Government Devolution Bill, but I am keen also to stress it with specific regard to the deal that local authorities in the north-east have made with the Government. It is not about powers going up and being taken away from local government, which has happened before, particularly when local authority mayors took powers that were held by local councillors, cabinet members and executive officers at a local level, and they moved upwards to become an elected individual.

Instead, the devolution we are proposing is about taking Government powers and moving them down. It is about empowering local decision makers to make decisions over areas of policy that they know best, because they are making those decisions closer to the communities and economies affected by them.

**Mr Steve Reed:** The hon. Gentleman says that the issue cannot be about taking decision-making powers away from localities and centralising them, but does he recognise that that is precisely what is happening in housing policy? Councils that want to provide more council housing are building it, only to have it sold off by the Government, who force them to do it whether they want to or not. That is the centralisation of decision making that should remain at the local level. It completely contradicts what he has just said.

**James Wharton:** The hon. Gentleman tempts me to shift the debate into the Housing and Planning Bill, which I do not want to do. I know his colleagues are engaged in detailed discussions about that in Committee at the moment. The Government have ambitious—but right—targets and commitments to deliver on housing. We need to ensure that we put in place the structures that enable us to do that. We need to ensure that we build the right houses in the right places for the people who need them. We need to give as many people as possible in our society the chance to own their own home, whether it is a local authority home or a privately built property.

Devolution is about transferring powers held by central Government down to local decision makers. However, within that, there is the opportunity for powers to be transferred up from local authorities, but only by consent. Local authorities might want to pool such powers and functions because they recognise the positives that can be driven by that; the opportunities for closer collaborative working; and the economic benefits that can then flow from such decision making.

No deals are being imposed. No area is compelled to have a devolution settlement. Areas have been invited to bid. We are having discussions with more than 30 of them about what the package might look like. That bespoke approach looks at the reality and recognises that different areas will need different things if they are to achieve what the policy can deliver. It recognises that what Greater Manchester needs will in some areas be different from what Tees Valley needs, which might be different from what the north-east needs, or different from what rural counties such as Cornwall might want and need from a devolution settlement. That is the right approach to ensuring that we get settlements that not only deliver on the commitments and the potential that we know they can unlock, but that stand the test of time and can actually deliver on a local area's needs.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I have asked this question before, in Committee, so I do not expect to get an answer. I accept the point that the Minister is making about areas being different and needing different solutions. However, the north-east was told quite clearly that it could have devolution, but a Mayor was not part of the model. There was no devolution settlement on the table.

**James Wharton:** The hon. Gentleman has asked that question many times, and I have answered it many times in the past. No area is compelled to accept devolution and no area will be compelled to have a metro Mayor, but where areas want a package of powers akin to that in Greater Manchester, there is an expectation from Government that a Mayor would come as part of the deal. That is what has happened in the north-east. I have a copy of the deal here. If it was more easily reachable, I would wave it energetically at hon. Members. It has been signed by local authority representatives, because a deal is a two-way thing. It recognises that we have reached a consensus on the powers and the structures that are agreed to deliver our shared objectives.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** I do not think we will be waving any document back at him this week.

If the people of Durham—if they are allowed more generally—vote against the mayoral model, and that is their will, will the Minister respect that and go ahead with the rest of the deal anyway?

**James Wharton:** The right hon. Gentleman has generously given me the chance to reach into my little red book and find the document in question, which I will now wave, signed as it is by so many of the great and good of local government in the north-east.

It is for local authorities to agree these deals through their leadership and to pass the resolutions to enact them through their democratic structures. If one local authority decides to remove itself from the deal, we will not allow that to prevent other local authorities from going ahead and delivering it, but, consistent with what I have already said, nor will we compel any area to be part of a devolution deal. If Durham decides not to pass a resolution, or through a council mechanism decides not to be part of a north-east deal, if the other local authorities want to go ahead, we will work with them to deliver it without Durham, should that be their choice. I hope, though, that that is not a choice that they will make—the hon. Member for North Durham and I disagree on that.

With a deal will come a number of areas of control and a number of possible levers with which local authorities will be able to help to drive the economic growth that we want to see.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Is the Minister aware that the Conservative members on Durham County Council support the approach agreed by the county council at its last meeting, which was that we should actually ask people by putting the matter to the ballot?

**James Wharton:** The hon. Gentleman tries, as always, to nudge the debate back to a slightly more party political platform. Mischievous as he occasionally is, I absolutely recognise that it is for the local members in local authority chambers to vote as they wish and speak

on behalf of the residents they represent. I put on record the excellent work done by County Councillor Richard Bell in the Conservative group on Durham County Council. He is a great advocate not only for the area he represents but for our region as a whole.

As I have said on the record quite clearly, I hope that Durham will be part of the north-east devolution deal. At the end of whatever processes Durham County Council decides to go through in its own area, I hope that it will pass a resolution to be part of the deal, because of what I think it could do for the north-east. If Durham chooses not to, and the other areas that have signed up to the deal none the less want to go ahead, we will work with them to deliver that, but I hope that we will not find ourselves in that position.

What comes with the deal? Why do I think that these deals are a good thing? I was interested in the somewhat straw man-esque discussion of artificial boundaries, or the A1 having more than one Mayor along its length—the solution to which, I suppose, would be a very long and winding constituency travelling either way up the full length of the road. When we are driving forward devolution deals, we have to look at all the existing boundaries and try to see through them to what makes sense economically. We are not going to say to areas, “You must follow one geography or the other”; that is exactly the opposite of what we are doing. We are saying to local areas, “Come and tell us the geography on which you want to do a deal. Identify the economic geography that makes sense to you. You know your local economy better than Whitehall and Westminster possibly can. You live and work in it; you understand it. Come to us and show us the area and the package of powers that will best enable you to drive growth in your area.” That is the approach we are taking, and its value has already been demonstrated clearly by the disagreement in this debate about what should happen in the north-east of England and in Tees valley. It is the approach that I think will ultimately stand the test of time and be successful.

With the deals, of course, comes more control over a number of areas. In the north-east, that includes strategic planning controls for the Mayor and closer working with UK Trade & Investment to drive investment. We saw in the spending review the announcement of additional support for UKTI, as well as for northern powerhouse investment work to bring investment to the north of England. That is welcome, not only because it gives us additional power to sell the UK abroad but because additional investment will go not just to London and the south, although we want them to continue to be successful, but further, coming up to the north, the north-east, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber. We want to see that succeed and we want closer co-operation between local decision makers and the bodies that deliver that support.

Joint responsibility is being agreed for employment and skills to redesign post-16 education across the north-east through its devolution deal. Again, that will recognise that the particular needs of the economy in that area are different from the needs of the economy in the Tees valley or Greater Manchester, or, indeed, in London or the south-east or wherever. We want to ensure that local decision makers have more of a say about and more control over how to target the available funding and ensure that the future needs of the economy are met by the skills of the workforce.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** Will the Minister say precisely how the elected Mayor will drive up inward investment in the region? What will he add to the work that is already done? Will he confirm that, for skills, what is on offer is a board member in a structure that effectively exists now? Is he saying that the whole of the will of the north-east of England—all the local knowledge and contribution that can be made—will be expressed through the cabinet member of the combined authority who is appointed to the skills group? I say this meaning no disrespect, but as far as I can see that group is composed of departmental officials who are not the elected representatives, or any sort of representatives, of the north-east of England.

**James Wharton:** In his questions, the right hon. Gentleman in some ways gets to the heart of some of what devolution is going to be about. On foreign investment and UKTI, the Government are saying that we want to see additional focus and support from that national body, which has been successful at selling our country abroad with its “Britain is GREAT” campaign, for the north of England to drive the opportunities that exist. With that additional support will come the opportunity to bring in more investment, but it is not for me to tell any future Mayor of the north-east—or of the Tees valley, Greater Manchester or wherever—how to go about doing their job and how to maximise the opportunities that exist. There are different opportunities in different places, which will require different approaches. That is the very essence of why devolution can be a powerful driver of growth. It is about empowering the people who know best what decisions are right.

I want to make a couple of points about the skills budget, because the right hon. Gentleman entered into an interesting area of debate. I know the importance of skills to our regional economies. I recognise the concern that he wants to project, but I do not agree with it. Having more localised control over skills is a significant positive step. The over-19s skills budget is going to be devolved to the north-east through the devolution deal that has been signed, and the north-east combined authority and Mayor will have more say over—and joint work to be delivered over—the 16-plus skills budget, which is to be welcomed.

Even more important than that—which is positive—is what devolution will allow us to do in future. It has started in this debate: we can already see that there are matters on which Members would like things to be a bit different or to go a bit further. There is a debate to be had about that in any devolution settlement. The value of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, which has gone through its Committee stage and will no doubt come back soon to the House on Report and Third Reading, is that it gives us the powers we need to go further when it is appropriate to do so.

Greater Manchester is on its third round of asks for devolution of powers. When it has been given a package and agreement with the Government, it has either identified things that the Government were unable to agree to initially and asked us to work with it to deliver them, or, through the process of thinking about the powers it has, it has identified new opportunities and come back to Government saying, “We want to go further” in this area or that. It is saying, “We want to take the next step,” or, “We want to bring in a policy area that we had not even thought of before.” That remains on the table

because of the nature of the devolution we are talking about: it is evolutionary and bespoke; it is custom-made for each area it affects; and it is being delivered along sensible and locally determined economic lines.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the post-16 budget be protected when it is devolved?

**James Wharton:** As the hon. Gentleman will have seen announced only yesterday, both the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 19-plus skills budget and the Department for Education 16-to-19 skills budget are protected in cash terms. In a time when we are still having to take difficult spending decisions because of the legacy left to us by the last Labour Government, that was a significant and welcome statement about the money that will be available to deliver on that agenda. Significant sums will remain available in those areas, which are being protected in cash terms because their value is very much recognised by the Government.

The north-east devolution deal will create a north-east land board to bring more public land into use and to look at the assets that exist across the region and how they can best be used to drive economic growth and improve opportunities across the region, tying in with some of the strategic planning work that will be going on through the new Mayor. By co-ordinating across local authorities, there will be the power to deliver that.

The devolution deal for the north-east is an exciting opportunity. Consider the investment fund of £30 million every year for 30 years, with, if that is spent wisely, the scope to increase—not to mention the additional funds that that can leverage in. The nearly £1 billion in that pot alone over the life of that part of the agreement is significant. I hope that a Mayor elected by the people of the north-east will focus that spending on the things that will drive forward the economy of the north-east—on the right things, determined by the local people who know what they are, to grow that economy and generate further growth and investment. That will enable more to be spent and the virtuous circle to continue.

This is an exciting time and an exciting agenda. I am pleased that the region I call home—Tees valley and the north-east, however the boundaries are drawn around it—is at the forefront of this process. I hope that those who have concerns will express them constructively and engage in this process, which can deliver real benefits to the people represented by the Members attending this debate today, with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Croydon North, although I know that his genuine and deep-seated interest in the process of devolution extends to the north-east, as it does more broadly in the Bill that we have discussed. I hope we can use this process to enable those people to drive real change and bring real benefits to their regions.

I commend the Government’s programme of devolution. I look forward to seeing it through, and I hope that in a few years’ time hon. Members will come here to talk not about their concerns but about where they want it to go next, because it is doing so much already.

3 pm

**Mr Brown:** This has been a good debate. We have explored the context and the detail of this devolution deal far more thoroughly than we are usually able to do

in the House. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for North Durham (Mr Jones) and for Croydon North (Mr Reed)—you will notice that they both represent the north, Mr Percy—for their contributions. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North for pointing out the difference between the Government's stated approach to the matters we are considering today and their approach to housing matters in the devolution deal, which we did not touch on, but which seem to be being centralised elsewhere.

The Minister, whose sincerity I acknowledge and whose interest and depth of knowledge I admire, made the best of pretty thin material. It is clear that we have not agreed on much; that is the nature of these things. The Government are walking away from their responsibility for regional policy, which is underpinned by their devolving their responsibility for the structures that they created in the north-east without devolving the money. In parallel, nationally they are walking away from their responsibility for redistribution by devolving business rates and making them a local government tax base, and getting rid of the redistributive element of the Department for Communities and Local Government grants. Indeed, it is clear that they intend to get rid of the grants and leave local authorities to get by on their own tax base, including their business rates tax base. That will have profound long-term consequences for our country and awful short-term effects on the north-east of England.

I urge the Government, even at this late stage, to think again about the structures and strategic approach that they are adopting nationally. It would be a mistake to walk away from the poorer parts of the country and say, "Get by on your local tax base" without any acknowledgement that the Government would be on the receiving end of all the centralising effects of the economy, but would have no responsibility for pushing back outwards or, in parallel, for dealing with the problems of the very poorest in our society. That is a long way from John Major's vision of the Conservative party.

The key fact is that the poor are not distributed evenly around the country and do not form the same proportion of council tax payers in various areas. Morally, demand has to be met, but there is also a statutory responsibility. This debate is overshadowed by what will happen to local authorities when their funding has been so diminished that they are pushed back to carrying out

only statutory functions, not carrying them out very well and then finding that they cannot do even that. It is no coincidence that the poorest local authorities in our country are also the most indebted. The Minister deployed the figures for reserves in the debate. It would also be good to look in parallel at the figures for indebtedness, because local authorities are of course responsible for the debts they carry, and there is a limit to how far that can be pushed.

I think the direction in which we are heading is wrong for our country. This debate is about just a small facet of that. Far from healing and giving new consents and justifiable resources to the areas that need them, the Government are doing the opposite in practice. I think that this deal will turn out to be unsatisfactory even from the Government's point of view, because they have constrained the relationship of the elected Mayor—who will not come into play until 2017 in any event—with the combined authority.

The region needs strong leadership. I have no quarrel with the Minister over whether it should be a single person or done in a more collegiate way. There is strength in the single-person model, but it must be somebody who has got authority. I reiterate that there is a pretty strong case for having a regional Minister with the Government behind them to get involved and help. The Government should not abandon their responsibilities while retaining the right to intervene and meddle and devolving a sum of money that is wholly inadequate to the purposes to which it is supposed to be applied.

So there we have it. We have not agreed on very much. My fear is the broader issue of the cohesion of the country as a whole. When an elected local authority cannot discharge even its mandatory statutory functions, what happens then? That question hangs over this debate, and so far it remains unanswered. It is not a theoretical question; the north-east of England could be there within two years if present trends continue. That would be an absolute disaster for the people whom every single political representative in this Chamber is trying to help.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the north-east devolution deal.

3.7 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 26 November 2015

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Council

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** My hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), the Minister with responsibility for farming, food and the marine environment, represented the UK at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 16 November in Brussels. Rebecca Evans AM and Aileen McLeod MSP also attended.

The main agenda item was the simplification of the common agricultural policy (CAP). Commissioner Hogan reiterated his commitment to CAP simplification. He provided an update on the changes made so far which included:

- preventative preliminary checks;
- an extension to the existing provision for member states to reduce on-the-spot checks subject to meeting a number of criteria set out by the Commission;
- a collective claims system under pillar 2 for agri-environment; and
- allowing farmers to modify their declarations for greening parcels.

There have also been changes to voluntary coupled support, the young farmers scheme and market measures. Furthermore Commissioner Hogan has:

- asked his services to simplify the penalty system;
- planned a package of delegated and implementing Acts before summer 2016 for greening; and
- appointed a high-level group on simplification of rural development.

The Commissioner acknowledged this work would likely reach the limits of what improvements could be made without opening the basic Acts. He indicated he was open to doing this if the Council so agreed.

For the second main agenda item, Commissioner Hogan set out his plans to progress the Commission's international trade agenda which in 2016 includes plans to visit Colombia, Mexico, India, Japan, China, Vietnam and the Philippines. The focus of these trade visits will include: dairy, livestock, fruit and vegetables, wine and spirits, and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, World Trade Organisation and Food and Agriculture Organisation negotiations. Some member states, including the UK, France and Ireland, expressed support for trade access efforts. However, a number of others, including Austria, Greece, Belgium and Hungary, urged caution, warning of the possible danger to EU competitiveness.

Commissioner Hogan also provided an update on the dairy aid package. The aid schemes for cheese and skimmed milk powder were accepting applications from member states, and a pigmeat scheme would be implemented in January. The Agricultural Markets Taskforce will begin its work in early 2016, and report with policy recommendations by the end of 2016.

The following were AOB items on the agenda:

Belgium asked the Commission what action had been taken to lift the pork ban which Russia had imposed after the outbreak of African swine fever in the Baltic member states and Poland. They underlined that pork prices were continuing to fall. An urgent need for a solution was supported by 10 other member states. The UK was supported by Poland and Lithuania in recognising the need for a solution, but underlined this could not come at the cost of EU unity.

The Czech Republic provided a report from the conference they hosted on hunting and game management. They concluded that measures could positively help prevent crop damage and the spread of disease by wildlife. Commissioner Hogan noted the Commission was undertaking a fitness check of the EU Natura legislation, which will be published in spring 2016. He also noted game management did not fall within the Commission's competence.

Italy pressed the Commission to form a high-level discussion group to continue to monitor the sugar sector in order to avoid a crisis when EU sugar quotas end in 2017. They were supported by Austria, Romania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Greece. The UK highlighted the restructuring aid that had already been provided, and reminded the Council to keep in mind developing countries that export to the EU. Commissioner Hogan reminded the Council that extensive restructuring funds have already been given, and an expert group had already been set up at Italy's request. He was not minded to take any further action.

The presidency updated the Council on the progress of the most recent trilogue for school schemes. The Parliament continues to be reluctant to engage, and no date has been set for the next trilogue. Many member states intervened to voice support for a well thought through deal, over a hasty compromise on the legal basis. The presidency and Commissioner Hogan were still optimistic that a deal could be reached.

[HCWS333]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Somalia Conflict, Security and Stability Fund

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** This written ministerial statement proposes the gifting of new equipment to the Somali national army (SNA).

It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to make a gift of a value exceeding £300,000, for the Department concerned to present to the House of Commons a minute giving particulars of the gift and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the gift until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The Government's priority for Somalia is to reduce the threat posed to UK national interests by building a more stable, peaceful and prosperous country. This includes improving the operational capability of the SNA to conduct security and stabilisation operations in Somalia, and better enable them to counter al-Shabaab.

The Government plan to deliver £3.2 million of gifting support to the SNA through the conflict, security and stability fund (CSSF). We will provide: computers; printers; generators; training aids; office equipment; tents; specialist vehicles—water bowsers, fuel tankers, recovery vehicles; individual kit (e.g. belts and blankets) and vehicle tools. We also intend to provide infrastructure support to refurbish buildings for military use. Working with the

UN and SNA, we will develop a basic repair and maintenance workshop for vehicles, increasing logistics and operational capacity.

The provision of equipment has been endorsed by the SNA and is in line with the UK's commitment to support the Guulwade plan, a Somali-owned plan—endorsed by donors—which sets out the SNA's capability requirements. The gifting of this equipment is consistent with export controls (no licence is required), complies with our international obligations, and will be procured through carefully selected implementing partners.

A memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Somali Government will attach conditions—e.g. SNA troops will be human rights trained; equipment will not be diverted or inappropriately used—to the supply of this equipment and support. An overseas security and justice assistance (OSJA) assessment has already been completed and will be kept under review. We will closely monitor the security situation and monitor and evaluate this programme, halting support if we believe the equipment or support is being misused.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which the minute is laid before the House of Commons, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or a motion relating to the minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval of the gift will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS334]

## HEALTH

### Savile Investigations: NHS

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I am today publishing an update on the Government's response to the recommendations set out in Kate Lampard's report on the themes and lessons learnt from NHS investigations into matters relating to Jimmy Savile. A copy of the update report can be found online.

On 26 February 2015, *Official Report*, columns 483-486, I advised the House that the Government accepted in principle 13 of the 14 recommendations in Kate Lampard's excellent report, including on access, volunteering, safeguarding, complaints and governance. I also asked the chief executives of Monitor and the Trust Development Authority, now brought together in NHS Improvement, to ensure that all trusts review their current practice against the recommendations within three months, and then to write back to me with a summary of plans and progress.

The update report published today provides a summary of actions taken in response to the 13 recommendations for the NHS, Department of Health and wider Government. All NHS trusts and foundation trusts have responded and those responses have been collated by Monitor and TDA, now NHS Improvement.

In summary, progress has been made against all the accepted recommendations. The vast majority of trusts have already taken action in response to the recommendations or are in the process of doing so. For

individual recommendations, at least 80% of providers planned to have implemented them by September 2015, with the remainder due to complete their action by the end of the year.

It is vital that trusts continue to be vigilant against the dangers of child sex abuse. NHS Improvement are currently reviewing CQC's well-led framework and how it applies to trusts, setting out expectations of NHS provider boards and their oversight of the organisations they are responsible for. Well-run boards should be able to assure themselves that their organisations have processes in place to ensure effective safeguarding, training and recruitment practices. NHS Improvement will consider how best to reflect the recommendations in this framework in an appropriate fashion.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-11-26/HCWS330/>

[HCWS330]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Director General of the National Crime Agency

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** I have selected Chief Constable Lynne Owens to be the new director general of the National Crime Agency (NCA). She has more than 25 years' experience in a variety of policing roles including key front-line experience and working on the most complex national investigations and operations. She has a strong track record of engaging teams and working in collaboration with partners, and most importantly she has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills. I am confident she is the right candidate to lead the NCA through the next phase of its development, leading and coordinating the national law enforcement response to serious and organised crime.

The director general leads and co-ordinates the whole of the UK law enforcement effort against serious and organised crime, a major national security threat. That threat costs the UK more than £24 billion a year and is varied, complex and changing rapidly. The NCA has a stronger mandate than any previous organisation, including the power to task UK police and other law enforcement agencies in order to align the UK's response against the highest priority threats, vulnerabilities and organised crime groups.

The NCA is now at a vital stage of its development and the next director general must set the future direction of the NCA, building on the strong foundation of the work of the outgoing Director General Keith Bristow, who retires shortly. The NCA must continue to develop the capabilities and relationships necessary to combat the threat from serious and organised crime, working in partnership with local and international law enforcement bodies to maximise the NCA's national and international reach.

Keith Bristow has been a dynamic first director general of the National Crime Agency and I am grateful for his hard work and commitment to making the UK a more

hostile environment for serious and organised criminals to operate. He has not shied away from exposing the nature and scale of the threat we face, and he has materially changed how we collectively tackle the threat from serious and organised crime.

Lynne Owens will ensure that the NCA continues to be at the forefront of work to tackle the full range of serious and organised crime threats, including cybercrime; child sexual abuse; firearms; modern slavery; organised immigration crime; drugs trafficking; money laundering; fraud; and bribery and corruption.

Lynne Owens is currently chief constable of Surrey Police and I expect her to take up post early next year. If there is a short gap, in the interim, I intend to appoint David Armond, the current deputy director general, as acting director general.

[HCWS335]

### Justice and Home Affairs Council

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** On 20 November, I attended the extraordinary meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels. The meeting was convened by the Luxembourg presidency in response to the appalling terrorist attacks which took place in Paris on 13 November 2015. Interior and Justice Ministers adopted strong Council conclusions on counter-terrorism which urge immediate action on passenger name records, firearms, strengthening controls of external borders, information sharing, terrorist financing, and the criminal justice response. Ministers also approved conclusions on the criminal justice response to radicalisation.

During the meeting I welcomed the agreement on the implementing regulation on deactivation standards and the Commission's proposal for a directive amending Council directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons. I highlighted that the UK has strong legislation on firearms, which has contributed to a significant reduction in crimes involving firearms. I reiterated the importance of progress on the passenger name records directive, and that it remained of vital importance to gain rapid agreement and ensure intra-EU flights were covered. I supported actions to strengthen the external border and stated that proactive sharing of criminal records data could improve member states' intelligence picture. Finally, I underlined that member states needed to have effective frameworks to tackle terrorist financing, and highlighted that new initiatives should not compromise existing regimes.

[HCWS337]

### Prüm Business and Implementation Case

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before the House the "Prüm Business and Implementation Case", (Cm 9149), which concludes that rejoining the Prüm decisions (EU Council decision 2008/615/JHA and its implementing decision, 2008/616/JHA, in conjunction with Council framework decision 2009/905/JHA) would be in the national interest as it would help us to identify foreign criminals and solve

serious crimes. This is also the view of law enforcement throughout the United Kingdom, and is based on evidence from those countries already operating the Prüm decisions and a successful small-scale pilot. It also makes clear that stringent safeguards would be put in place in implementing the Prüm decisions, meaning that no fingerprint or DNA profiles relating to innocent British citizens would be used in implementing the measures and that higher UK scientific standards would be applied. An oversight board, including the biometrics and information commissioners, would oversee the domestic operation of the Prüm decisions.

[HCWS336]

### PRIME MINISTER

#### Syria: Response to Foreign Affairs Committee

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** Ahead of my oral statement today, I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses, my response to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's 2nd Report on "The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria".

Attachments can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-11-26/HCWS331/>

[HCWS331]

### TRANSPORT

#### Future of Rail

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin):** I wish to inform the House of the latest developments on rail investment and the recent publication of Sir Peter Hendy's re-plan in resetting the rail upgrade programme, which can be found on the Network Rail website.

In June, I announced that important aspects of Network Rail's investment programme were costing more and taking longer. I also announced the appointment of Sir Peter Hendy as the new chair of Network Rail, and asked him to develop proposals for how the rail upgrade programme could be put on a more realistic and sustainable footing.

Sir Peter Hendy has now provided me with his proposal for how to re-plan our rail upgrades, following his advice to un-pause works on TransPennine and Midland Main Line in September. I have accepted his recommendations, subject to a short period of consultation with relevant stakeholders. His report was published on 25 November as part of the spending review announcements. I placed a copy of his report in the Libraries of both Houses yesterday.

Firstly, I want to be absolutely clear that no infrastructure schemes have been cancelled. Flagship improvement works to build a Northern Powerhouse in the north and the midlands are under way, helping to rebalance our

country's economy by creating an engine for growth. Electrification of the TransPennine and Midland Main Line has already resumed and will completely transform the railways by improving city to city connectivity.

Radical schemes such as Crossrail, Thameslink and works on the Great Western will make journeys better, simpler, faster and more reliable throughout the south-east and south-west. Britain's railways are truly on the road to recovery, despite years of underinvestment by successive Governments.

Sir Peter and I are both absolutely resolute in our drive to fix the problems in the planning process for rail enhancements. That is why I asked Dame Colette Bowe to look at lessons learned from the planning processes used for the 2014-19 enhancements programme, and to make recommendations for better investment planning in future. I published her report on 25 November, which I have laid as a Command Paper in the House and copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have accepted all of Dame Colette Bowe's recommendations. My Department, together with Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road, are taking urgent steps to develop and implement a number of actions following her recommendations. These will ensure that an improved approach to planning and delivering rail infrastructure enhancements are put in place. I have placed a copy of my response to the Bowe report in the Libraries of both Houses and on my Department's website.

Building the infrastructure our country needs is incredibly challenging. It depends on hard work and good design and thousands of people working night after night, sometimes in very difficult conditions. Over Christmas and new year alone, over 20,000 members of Network Rail will be working to deliver the railway upgrade plan. This is a £150 million investment, which will provide new station facilities, longer platforms, extra tracks, new junctions and thousands of pieces of new, more reliable equipment to make journeys better.

We must continue to invest. Our railways matter, not just helping people get around, but helping them get on. It is absolutely crucial that our infrastructure is delivered efficiently and continues to represent the best value for money.

[HCWS332]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Personal Independence Payments

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson):** Later today, I will publish Command Paper Cm 9159, the Government's second response to the independent review of the personal

independence payment (PIP) assessment. The review was carried out by Paul Gray and published in December 2014.

This paper provides an update of the actions my Department has taken against the short-term recommendations identified in the first review and its response to the remaining medium and long-term recommendations.

My Department has accepted all the medium and long-term recommendations in full except the recommendation to put in place and announce a

"rigorous and qualitative evaluation strategy",

which we have partially accepted. My Department already monitors all aspects of the PIP process through operational checks, performance monitoring, including the publication of quarterly statistics, and ad hoc analysis. At the right stage in the PIP programme, as the evidence base builds from phasing in full PIP roll-out, my Department will develop an appropriate evaluation plan.

Since the Government's first response to this review in February 2015, we have continued to make significant improvements to the PIP process with the average new claimant now waiting five weeks for an assessment, compared to 10 weeks in February 2015. My Department has used evidence from previous phases of PIP roll-out together with lessons learnt from the first review to ensure we are continuously improving the way in which PIP is delivered. Furthermore we remain committed to working closely with claimants and disability organisations and will continue to do so.

As set out in legislation, there will be a second independent review of PIP which will report by April 2017.

This paper will be available on the gov.uk website once it has been published.

[HCWS329]

### Social Security Up-rating

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara):** My noble Friend the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Altmann) has made the following written statement.

I am pleased to announce the proposed social security benefits rates for 2016. I have attached the table of rates to this statement and I will place a copy of the proposed benefit and pension rates 2016-17 in the Library of the House. The annual uprating of benefits will take place for state pensions and most other benefits in the first full week of the tax year. In 2016, this will be the week beginning 11 April. A corresponding provision will be made in Northern Ireland.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-11-26/HCWS328/>

[HCWS328]

# Petition

Thursday 26 November 2015

## OBSERVATIONS

### JUSTICE

#### Closure of Wakefield Magistrates' Court

*The petition of residents of the Wakefield constituency,*

Declares that the Petitioners are concerned about the proposed closure of Wakefield Magistrates' Court and the impact this will have on access to justice in areas including Wakefield, Pontefract, Castleford, Featherstone, Normanton and Knottingley; further that the closure of the court would force local people to travel to Leeds; and further that this proposal follows the 2013 closure of Pontefract Magistrates' Court, which resulted in some staff and work moving to Wakefield Magistrates' Court.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to reconsider the proposal to close Wakefield Magistrates' Court.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Creagh, *Official Report*, 13 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 287.]

[P001548]

*Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara):*

The consultation on the provision of court and tribunals services in England and Wales ran from 16 July to 8 October 2015. HM Courts & Tribunals Service is currently in the process of assessing all responses to the consultation and expects to announce the outcome in due course. I have asked HM Courts & Tribunals Service officials to record the points and suggestions made in the petition so that they can be fully considered as part of the consultation process.

The HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform Programme is a once in a generation opportunity to create a modern, user focused and efficient courts and tribunals service. As part of this programme, on 16 July 2015 I announced proposals for the reform of the court and tribunal estate.

Whilst HM Courts & Tribunals Service acknowledge and accept that some people will need to travel further to reach their nearest court and for some the journey, if made by public transport, may be over an hour, for the majority of people the closure will have little impact. We are mindful of the infrequency with which people need to attend court and the small proportion of people would use public transport to reach court.

Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court. We are committed to providing alternatives to travel, for example through making better use of technology, including video conferencing, and exploring whether we can appropriately make use of civic buildings for certain types of hearing.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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# PETITION

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