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24 May 2016**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 24 May 2016**

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# House of Commons

Tuesday 24 May 2016

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That the Address of 25th April, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Ruth Evans to the Office of Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority for a period of 5 years with effect from 1 June 2016, was presented to Her Majesty, who was graciously pleased to comply with the request.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### EU Sanctions: Russia

1. **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): What assessment he has made of the likelihood of EU sanctions against Russia being renewed as a result of that country's recent actions in Crimea and the Donbas. [905037]

15. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What assessment he has made of the likelihood of EU sanctions against Russia being renewed as a result of that country's recent actions in Crimea and the Donbas. [905053]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** Russia is failing to fulfil its commitments under the Minsk agreements. Ceasefire violations in the Donbas continue, and these must end. Russia must stop supporting and directing the separatists. Last year, the European Council decided sanctions should be clearly linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. We strongly support the continued application of this robust approach, and we expect that the European Union will extend tier 3 sanctions for a further six months this summer. There are separate sanctions in place relating specifically to Crimea, and our strong view is that they must remain in place while Russia's illegal annexation continues.

**Mims Davies:** More than 9,000 people have died as a result of hostilities in Ukraine. Given the recent tensions, including over the supply of electricity to Crimea, will the Foreign Secretary tell the House what more can be done to reach peace in the region?

**Mr Hammond:** I regret that I have to say to my hon. Friend that it is a long haul of maintaining pressure on Russia—through isolation from the international community and through maintaining the EU sanctions that are in place. At the moment, we have no other tools that are likely to prove effective.

**Neil Parish:** I very much understand the need for sanctions because of Russia's aggression towards the Ukraine, but one problem is that milk and other dairy products are very much involved in those sanctions, and that is having a dramatic effect in terms of the downward price of dairy products. Is there any way that the food and dairy side of these sanctions can be taken away?

**Mr Hammond:** The sanctions my hon. Friend refers to are in fact Russian counter-sanctions that have been imposed against EU producers. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that, despite the sanctions measures Russia has taken in retaliation against EU agricultural producers, agricultural exports from the European Union in 2015 were up by 6%, showing that our producers—Europe-wide producers—are able to address the challenge of Russian sanctions and to find alternative markets elsewhere.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): On the Ukraine, does the Secretary of State accept that Russian bombing of Syrian civilians to provoke refugees and possibly to tilt the balance in favour of Brexit is part of a strategy to fragment European resolve on Ukraine? He is frowning—obviously he has not thought about that.

**Mr Hammond:** There is definitely a Russian strategy to try to fragment European resolve. It is probably a step too far to suggest that Russia's engagement in Syria is designed only to apply pressure over Ukraine. Russia has important and historical equities in Syria and is seeking to defend its interests there. But, overall, Russia's behaviour in Syria and Ukraine gives us deep cause for concern about the established security settlement that we have been used to living with for the last 25 years.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Did the Secretary of State read the Max Hastings article in *The Sunday Times* this Sunday, in which he expresses deep concern about the threat from Russia and about the way Russia is now preparing to use cyber-methods against Europe and our allies? Will he take action to make sure that this country of ours is prepared to match up to those threats, and will he seek succour from the European Union in doing that?

**Mr Hammond:** I did not read the article in *The Sunday Times* that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but I am very familiar with that author's views on this subject and very familiar with the problem. We are taking action to strengthen our cyber-defence and, as I announced three years ago when I was Defence Secretary, to create an avowed UK offensive cyber-capability. We are still the only nation that has publicly declared the fact that we are developing an offensive cyber-capability for retaliatory purposes if we are attacked.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): The Foreign Affairs Committee was in Russia last week and would certainly agree with the assessment that our relations with Russia are in the deep freeze, as reflected by my right hon.

Friend's rhetoric. Russia appears to be strategically stuck in its position in the global naughty corner of international relations. Do we not need to be thinking about ways in which we might get Russia out of this position, even if it is only a substantial investment in people-to-people links, Chevening scholarships, cultural relations and everything else?

**Mr Hammond:** I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that although our relationships with Russia are in a very difficult phase at the moment and we have suspended most business-as-usual relations, we have maintained our cultural links with Russia and cultural exchanges do continue, including at ministerial level. Russia has its own agenda, and from the point of view of the Kremlin it is not so obvious to me that it will regard its current strategy as failing and in need of revision. Russia is ensuring that the countries that it regards as its near abroad are unable to make free choices about their futures, and I judge that to be the No. 1 priority for the Kremlin.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Foreign Secretary believe that there is any scope for expanding the EU sanctions to include the Russians involved in the murder of Magnitsky and also the Russians involved in the expropriation of \$100 billion dollars-worth of shareholders' money in relation to Yukos?

**Mr Hammond:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Yukos issue is a matter that is currently before the courts, and there has been a recent decision in this case. We have looked at the options for expanding sanctions to cover other areas, but we found that the individuals who could be targeted are already either, in effect, covered by other measures or would not be affected by the kind of sanctions that we could impose. So, as a Government, we do not see any prospect of expanded sanctions.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): Returning to the original question by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), does my right hon. Friend agree that there can be no question of EU sanctions or Council of Europe sanctions being lifted until Nadiya Savchenko is unconditionally released, until intervention in Donbas has ceased, and until the future of Crimea is properly and freely determined?

**Mr Hammond:** That is our position. Of course, we need to maintain a consensus within the European Union on renewal of sanctions, and that is work that we are continuously engaged in. I am confident that sanctions will be rolled over this summer, but we have to make the case again every six months for continuing those sanctions.

### Bangladesh

2. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with his Bangladeshi counterpart on the protection of human rights in that country. [905038]

7. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh on violence towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in that country. [905044]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I would like to start by expressing my condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones and homes to Cyclone Roanu over the weekend. I welcome the strong leadership shown by the Government of Bangladesh.

I raised my concerns about human rights and violence against LGBT people again this morning with the Bangladeshi high commissioner. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), raised this with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh during his visit there in August 2015.

**Simon Danczuk:** With extra-judicial killings, disappearances of political opponents and fraudulent elections, Bangladesh is quickly becoming a failed state. Does the Minister not think that it is time to start applying some form of sanctions to try to get Sheikh Hasina to hold a proper general election as soon as possible?

**Mr Swire:** Like all those in this House, I was absolutely appalled by the senseless murders of the LGBT activists Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy, and we call on the Bangladeshi Government to bring those responsible for the killings to justice. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Extremist-related murders of members of minority religious groups and those whose views and lifestyles are contrary to Islam have increased in Bangladesh since February 2015, and we are discussing this regularly with the Government of that country.

**Alex Cunningham:** The Minister has said that he has talked to the Bangladeshi Government, but does he really think that that Government are taking sufficient steps to tackle the issue of violence against LGBT people?

**Mr Swire:** Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, giving £162 million in 2015-16—so our voice has some influence there. In the past year our human rights and democracy programme has provided safety training for bloggers, and we have also funded a project promoting the rights of LGBT groups in Bangladesh, but there is a huge amount more to do. We are not shy of pushing the Government of Bangladesh in the right direction, but sometimes it takes a little bit of time and persuasion.<sup>1</sup>

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): The human rights of secularists in Bangladesh are threatened. Last month, Nazimuddin Samad, a law student in Dhaka, was killed for blogging, "I have no religion." Will my right hon. Friend raise this with his Bangladeshi counterparts and ensure that secularists' rights are also protected in Bangladesh?

**Mr Swire:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There was not only the Daesh-claimed killing on 9 April in Dhaka of Nazimuddin Samad, but the murder on 23 April of Rezaul Karim Siddique in Rajshahi, in the east of the country. This is becoming an all too familiar occurrence in Bangladesh. There is a disagreement: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina blames the opposition

1. [Official Report, 26 May 2016, Vol. 611, c. 1MC.]

parties for trying to destabilise the country and the victims for insulting Islam; we think the problem goes beyond that.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): Do not the Government of Bangladesh's inability to protect human rights and the absence of effective opposition to that Government require the UK Government, which continues to provide substantial aid to Bangladesh, to have a timetable for intervention to ensure that democracy and human rights continue in that country and do not fall under a single-party state?

**Mr Swire**: I do not think my hon. Friend is suggesting that we should tie our aid, which helps some of the worst-off people in the world, with political progress, but I take on board his point. There is much more we can do in Bangladesh and we are trying, not least through the role of the new Commonwealth Secretary-General. Bangladesh is of course a member of the Commonwealth and we want the Commonwealth to take more action in that country, which at the moment is not heading in the right direction.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Around 70 to 80 women and children are trafficked from Bangladesh abroad each day. Law enforcement is failing to prevent forced prostitution. What discussions is the Foreign Secretary having to press that legal systems prevail for women and girls in Bangladesh?

**Mr Swire**: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, although of course it is not just Bangladesh that is affected. We have done a lot on human trafficking through legislation; we have also done a lot on the supply chain, where I know there are concerns. We continue to raise the matter, not just in Bangladesh but in countries around the world. It is something we want to erase. It is unfortunately all too common and we take it seriously.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): I am delighted to hear that the Minister is so concerned about the recent killings of liberal activists in Bangladesh. He mentioned the brutal murder on 25 April of Xulhaz Mannan, editor of the country's first and only LGBT magazine, and the appalling fatal machete attack on blogger Nazimuddin Samad on 6 April. Surely the Government of Bangladesh have been far too slow to act. What additional pressure are he and the Government prepared to put on the Government of Bangladesh to ensure that these murders are dealt with properly?

**Mr Swire**: The Government of Bangladesh would argue, as the high commissioner did to me this morning, that one of the victims of these crimes was a cousin of a former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, so this is something they are taking extremely seriously. I do believe that Bangladesh has a problem, and we will continue to talk to our Bangladeshi counterparts on a range of issues, some of which are of very great concern.

#### Yazidi Population: Syria and Iraq

3. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the extent of threats to the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq. [905039]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood)**: Britain and other countries have been appalled by Daesh's actions against Yazidis and other minorities in northern Iraq. It has prompted us to join other countries in taking action through the formation of the international coalition against Daesh, which now includes more than 60 countries.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck**: As the Minister will know, many Yazidi women and girls who suffered sexual slavery at the hands of Daesh experienced severe trauma, but they struggle to access the support they need. What steps have the UK Government taken under their preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative to promote access to mental health care for all those victims?

**Mr Ellwood**: The hon. Lady is right to point to the importance of the support that we need to provide not just to the Yazidis, but to other minorities that have been affected by Daesh. We are the largest donor to Iraq's humanitarian pooled fund and there are a number of programmes, including those of the Department for International Development and the human rights and democracy fund, to provide exactly the sort of assistance that is required immediately.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As the Minister and the questioner have made clear, the key threat to the Yazidi population and other religious minorities is the control of territory by Daesh. Does my hon. Friend therefore welcome the news this morning that a major assault has been launched to retake Falluja, and does he agree that the liberation of towns and cities is the way that such threats will finally be put to an end?

**Mr Ellwood**: My hon. Friend is right. Little by little, we are able to remove from Daesh the territory that it has held. Falluja was one of the first cities to fall to Daesh. Along with Mosul, these will be important changes that show that Daesh is finally being removed from the territory. But as the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) pointed out, once we have defeated Daesh militarily, there is a huge amount of work to do on stabilisation and humanitarian support for the people who have suffered so much as a result of the atrocities.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Yazidi people of Iraq were given two choices by Daesh in 2014—convert or die. Will the UK Government accept that what happened in Sinjar was genocide, and urge the Iraqi Government to work with the International Criminal Court to bring murderers and rapists to justice?

**Mr Ellwood**: The hon. Lady raises an important point. Britain stepped forward, along with other countries, to make sure that we were able to provide airdrops and safe passage on Mount Sinjar, which were critical to support for the Yazidis. Her question has been debated at length in this Chamber and I very much support her views, together with John Kerry and the European Parliament, and this Parliament voted on the matter. However, it is not for us to make those judgments; it is for the International Criminal Court. We are helping to collect the evidence to make sure that when the time is appropriate, we can bring those people to justice.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the money that this country spends supporting refugees in Iraq and Syria can support a far greater number of people far better than attempting to relocate refugees to the UK, and that it is right that the focus of our efforts is to support people in the region?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. The Yazidis as a group are endogamous and have not grown as much as other groupings in Iraq. They want to stay together and they want to stay in the area. For every one person that we are able to support in the UK, we can support more than 20 people in location—clearly, on a different standard, but it means that our money can go a lot further and we can pride ourselves on being one of the largest supporters in Syria and Iraq.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister has just repeated the arguments he made to the House on 20 April against referring the genocide of the Yazidi people to the UN Security Council, which this House unanimously rejected. The Minister's arguments have been challenged in the other place, where the noble Lord Pannick QC pointed out that article VIII of the convention on the prevention of genocide explicitly gives the UK Government the power to make such a referral. May I press the Minister to respect the will of this House and refer the matter to the UN Security Council without further delay?

**Mr Ellwood:** I very much join in the spirit of the hon. Lady's remarks, but we have to work within the mechanics of such a referral. We took the initiative to bring the situation to the awareness of the International Criminal Court in 2014. Our efforts were vetoed by two permanent members of the Security Council. That will happen again unless we are able to provide the necessary evidence, which is exactly what we are doing. We will hold those people to account, but there is an order and a process that we must honour. I entirely agree with the spirit of what the hon. Lady wants to do.

### Middle East: Press Freedom

4. **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): What recent representations he has made to his counterparts in the middle east on press freedom in that region.  
[905040]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** We encourage all countries to respect freedom of the media. On concerns about freedom of expression in the middle east, we clearly set out these concerns in our annual human rights report, which was most recently published in April.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** It is now four years since the Saudi writer Raif Badawi was arrested. Earlier this month his wife was sentenced to 1,000 lashes for promoting her husband's cause around the world. Given that it was British engineers who have extracted Saudi oil and built their roads, and given our massive co-operation on matters of defence and foreign policy, are not people around the world and in this country right to have expected a bit more progress than the Government have obtained so far?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Gentleman and I have debated these matters, both publicly and privately, for a long time. We have a right, duty and determination to raise those matters both in public and in private, and we make no distinction between the two. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has done that on a number of occasions, as have I. It is for the court in Saudi Arabia to follow its processes, as I have explained to the hon. Gentleman in the past. We must encourage advancement in society in Saudi Arabia, but that will not happen overnight.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): While encouraging press freedom, what more can the Foreign Office do to tackle Daesh's misuse of the internet, to ensure that free speech is not twisted and abused?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which we have raised in this House on a number of occasions. The tool used by Daesh to exploit others and to reach every home in every corner of the globe—it will also be used by future extremists—is the internet. We need to make sure that we are able to counter those messages. Daesh is sending a false message of hope, promising a fast track to paradise. We have formed the strategic communications cell in the Foreign Office, which is bringing together expertise from around the country and, indeed, the world to make sure that we can counter the Daesh messages, whether they be on Twitter, Facebook or other websites.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): What representations has the Minister made to President Erdogan's Government in Turkey about their action against press freedom and their suspension of parliamentary immunities, which may open opposition MPs to accusations of offences such as insulting the President? Will the Minister confirm that there are no plans to introduce an offence of insulting the Prime Minister and that a country engaged in such anti-democratic activities would not be eligible for European Union membership?

**Mr Ellwood:** I concur with the right hon. Gentleman's view that a free and fair media environment makes for a healthier society. We encourage constructive debate, which is a vital component of a fair and functioning society, no matter where it happens. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has raised the right hon. Gentleman's specific point with the Turkish Government.

**Alex Salmond:** On the importance of setting an example, can the Minister conceive of circumstances where, on finding that a Scottish newspaper was to publish some inconvenient information about Libya, a Minister in the last coalition Government would have tried to suppress that edition?

**Mr Ellwood:** I think that the right hon. Gentleman is wandering down a particular rabbit hole. We never intervene in the media in that manner, unless it is a matter of state security.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Press freedoms are being withdrawn in Turkey. Will the Minister outline the Government's current position on Turkey's accession to the EU?

**Mr Ellwood:** Turkey is covered by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. If I may, I will ask him to write to my hon. Friend.

**Mr Speaker:** Very prudent, especially as the question related to press freedom. It was rather naughty of the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) to seek to divert the Minister from the path of virtue, but he was not so tempted.

**Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab):** Does the Minister agree that press freedom in Turkey has been in decline for many years? Despite the fact that he is not directly responsible for the issue, he must know that President Erdogan has been cracking down on his opponents when they make even the mildest of criticisms of him in the press, and now that the immunity of MPs is being lifted in Turkey, human rights will decline even further.

**Mr Ellwood:** We do not want to see journalists being intimidated, the internet being blocked or people's ability to speak freely being interfered with, wherever they are in the world. We will continue to make that case from this place and in our direct communications with those Governments.

**Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend share my view that the notable journalist and writer T. E. Lawrence—better known as Lawrence of Arabia—was an exponent of freedom in the middle east? Now that the Government have prevented the export of his robes and dagger, where will the public be able to see them as an inspiration for greater understanding of the middle east and to encourage greater freedom in that part of the world?

**Mr Ellwood:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on weaving in an important aspect of our history and making it relevant to this question. He is absolutely right about the importance of saving not only the robe but the dagger for the nation. They will not be leaving the country. The dagger was given to Lawrence of Arabia by Sherif Nasir after Lawrence's fantastic attack on Aqaba. On his way there—this was glossed over by the media at the time—he accidentally shot his camel, but he continued on another camel and was able to take Aqaba. He later moved to work in the Foreign Office, and I would like the garment—the gown or the robe—and indeed the dagger to be on display in the Foreign Office. I am not sure that we will be successful in that, but I am glad to say that the dagger will stay in the United Kingdom.

**Mr Speaker:** We are very glad that the Minister is spending his time in the Foreign Office so profitably and is becoming so learned.

#### European Migration: Western Balkans

5. **Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of recent steps to reduce migration to Europe through the western Balkans.

[905042]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** Since agreement was reached between the EU and Turkey on additional

measures to control migration to Europe, we have seen a very significant reduction in the number of migrants arriving in Greece and transiting through the western Balkans.

**Karen Lumley:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the root cause of the migration pushing people through the Balkans has been the civil war in Syria? Does he agree that this country must certainly never be part of the Schengen area, which could allow people to be pushed to the UK?

**Mr Hammond:** I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's point. Of course we must not be part of the Schengen area. We will not be part of the Schengen area, and thanks to the special arrangements we have negotiated with the European Union, we are able to enjoy the benefits of membership without being forced to take part in the passport-free area.

I would say to my hon. Friend that although the Syrian civil war was clearly the immediate cause of the flow of refugees that Europe faced, primarily last year, statistics show that about 50% of those arriving in Greece are actually not from Syria or the surrounding area but come from further afield. What started as an exodus from the Syrian civil war and the Daesh occupation has become a wider movement of people.

**Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab):** The measures introduced by our European partners—working with other countries, particularly in the former Yugoslavia—such as the civil protection mechanism are starting to have an impact in the region. What further work can be done to share information through Europol to make sure that we really tackle the scourge of smuggling across eastern and central Europe?

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is right: sharing information between European security agencies, intelligence agencies and border police is key to breaking the business model of the smugglers. That is one of the key elements to solving this problem. Such people are being exploited by the organised criminal gangs that are taking their money, often for very little in return, and we need to nail them.

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** On migration to Europe, there has been a great deal of discussion recently about potential new EU member states. Article 49 of the treaty, which deals with countries applying to join the EU, says:

“The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously”.

It is therefore clear that each existing member state has a veto. However, this weekend a serving member of the Government went on national television and denied this. One of the seven principles of public life is:

“Holders of public office should be truthful.”

Will the Foreign Secretary therefore take this opportunity to confirm the correct position, as the Prime Minister has already done on Sunday?

**Mr Hammond:** Yes, I am very happy to do so. As we have said ad nauseam, everyone single member state has a veto on the accession of any new member state. In our case, any proposal to expand the European Union

would require the approval of this House. I can assure the House that those safeguards remain in place and are undiluted, and all my colleagues in the Government should be fully aware of that situation.

#### **Palestinian Territories: Radicalisation**

6. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the extent of radicalisation in the Palestinian Territories. [905043]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I condemn all violence and all efforts to incite or radicalise people to commit violence in the middle east. During my most recent visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories in February, I raised this issue with the Palestinian Authority and urged them to do more to tackle this issue and make clear their opposition to violence.

**Craig Tracey:** Last week, the Fatah party in Palestine described the terrorist who killed 26 people and wounded more than 80 in a shooting attack at a Israel's main airport in 1972 as a "hero" and said it was "proud of every fighter who has joined our mighty revolution" against Israel. Does the Minister agree that the success of the two-state solution that we all want rests upon the Palestinian Authority starting to teach its young people about peaceful coexistence?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about peaceful coexistence. It is important that President Abbas condemn statements such as that when they are made. I have noticed a disjunct between the elderly leadership and the youth, who feel disfranchised and so are taking matters into their own hands. I looked into the particular claim that my hon. Friend has raised; I understand that it was placed on Facebook and so was not attributed to a particular Minister, as has been the case in the past. Nevertheless, it should be condemned and removed, as my hon. Friend indicated.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that people's expectation that they will be able to carry on living in their own homes would not normally be regarded as a sign of radicalisation? He will know that in the past week he has received a number of parliamentary questions from me and others about the fact that more than 90 Palestinian Bedouins, mostly children, have lost their homes in the village of Jabal al-Baba. He has said in his written answers that the Foreign Office condemns that but also that it has not raised that specific case with the Israeli authorities. Is it not time to do so, not least because the demolished structures are EU funded?

**Mr Ellwood:** I fully concur with the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman has said. I have visited one of the Bedouin camps. I should make it clear that that situation is different from the situation for those based in the occupied Palestinian territories; some are being removed in green line Israel, as well. These people are reliant on farming and so need space, so there is the internal issue of making sure that they are given the same amount of space if there is a requirement for them to be moved.

#### **Sombath Somphone**

8. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What recent reports he has received on the case of Sombath Somphone in Laos. [905046]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I raised Sombath's disappearance with Laos's then Foreign Minister, now Prime Minister, Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, when we opened the new Lao embassy in London in November 2014. Sombath's disappearance was raised at the annual EU-Laos human rights dialogue in October. We will continue to highlight our interest in this particular case.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. In addition to the disappearance of Sombath, the whereabouts of three students arrested in 1999 and another nine arrested in 2009 are still unknown. Can my right hon. Friend update the House on what the UK is doing more generally about discussions with Laos on human rights?

**Mr Swire:** Indeed I can. We have an annual EU-Laos human rights dialogue; the last one was held in October 2015, and the next is scheduled for the final quarter of 2016. The Laos Government agreed to establish a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into Sombath's disappearance following a British recommendation in Laos's universal periodic review of human rights last year. We will not cease in pursuing this particular case and the others to which my hon. Friend alludes.

#### **Yemen**

9. **Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of progress in the peace process in Yemen. [905047]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The past couple of years have been long and difficult for Yemen, so I very much welcome the cessation of hostilities that began on 10 April and the UN-led talks that began in Kuwait on 21 April.

**Keith Vaz:** Yesterday, a suicide bomb in Aden killed 45 people who were trying to join the Yemeni army. What steps can we take to stop that beautiful city in Yemen, where I and other Members of this House were born, being destroyed by the civil war going on between the various forces?

**Mr Ellwood:** First, I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for raising these matters regularly. He has huge expertise on Yemen, and I am pleased that he is able to hold the Government to account on what we are doing in this important area of the middle east. He is right that events are taking place because hardliners want to throw the talks and the cessation of hostilities off track. We encourage both sides to stay firm in their commitment to a political solution, not least because of the humanitarian catastrophe taking place.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): A series of serious allegations were made yesterday by Amnesty International about the alleged use of



UK-manufactured cluster munitions against civilians in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition. Did the Minister, or any UK personnel operating in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, have any knowledge that those cluster munitions were being used? If so, what action has been taken?

**Mr Ellwood:** That is probably more a question for the Ministry of Defence, but from my understanding—my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has just confirmed this—we are not at all aware of this. Let me make it clear that the munitions that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned are almost three decades old. They are probably past their sell-by date, and it would be dangerous for anybody to go anywhere near them.

#### Iran: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

10. **Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the joint comprehensive plan of action with Iran. [905048]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** The International Atomic Energy Agency's most recent report on Iran's nuclear activities concluded that Iran is complying with its obligations under the JCPOA. We have been working to help British businesses take advantage of new commercial opportunities, and to ensure that Iran benefits from sanctions relief, including seeking to address barriers within the international banking system to both objectives.

**Mr Burrowes:** Since the signing of the nuclear deal, a religious minority still suffers from systematic persecution. Baha'is and Christians are routinely harassed, arrested and detained, and have received sentences totalling 193 years for simply manifesting their faith. What will the Government do to ensure that the new dawn in relations shines a light on Iran's human rights abuse of religious freedom?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Iran's human rights record remains shocking, as does its record of interfering in the affairs of its neighbours in the Gulf. The JCPOA, to which he referred, is a narrowly targeted agreement designed to shut down Iran's capability to produce a nuclear weapon, and it has been effective in delivering that outcome. We will continue to make representations—I spoke with the Iranian Foreign Minister in Vienna only last week on some specific human rights cases that affect dual nationality British citizens, and we will continue to make such representations.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary referred to Iran's interference in the affairs of neighbouring countries, and he mentioned the Gulf. Will he say something about our Government's attitude to Iran's interference in other countries in the region, particularly its role in Iraq and in helping Assad in Syria?

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is right. Iran is a significant player in the politics of Iraq, although generally not in a way that is helpful, and it is a significant backer of the Assad regime in Syria, with Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ground forces taking part in action in defence of the regime. Iran is also a member of the International Syria Support Group, and as such it is

incumbent on it, as well as on Russia, to apply pressure on Assad to deliver on the commitments made in the Vienna forum..

#### Middle East

11. **Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the effect of the recent activities of Hamas in Gaza on the middle east peace process. [905049]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The recent activities of Hamas in Gaza, including attempts to rearm and rebuild tunnel infrastructure, undermine efforts to improve the situation in Gaza and harm prospects for the middle east peace process. Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza must permanently end rocket fire and other attacks against Israel.

**Mrs Ellman:** In April, two new terror tunnels built by Hamas to launch attacks on Israeli civilians were discovered. Does the Minister believe that Hamas is planning new attacks on Israel?

**Mr Ellwood:** As I said earlier, I believe that is a worrying development, and we seek to place pressure on Hamas, and all those close to it, to recognise that it will take us back to where we were two years ago, unless there is a direction of travel.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Does the Minister place any significance on the founding charter of Hamas, which is clearly, or to a large extent, a stream of the most visceral anti-Semitism, and even includes approving references to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion"?

**Mr Ellwood:** I have many conversations about that situation and the challenges we face in the middle east, not least in Gaza and the west bank. A number of commentators have said, "You need to speak to Hamas; you need to get them to the table", but until Hamas changes its constitution, in which it clearly does not recognise the state of Israel, it will be impossible for us to move forward.

#### Departmental Estate: Rodent Eradication

12. **Mr Keith Simpson** (Broadland) (Con): What steps he is taking to eradicate rodents and other vermin in his Department's Whitehall estate. [905050]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** The FCO facilities management contract covers pest control activities. However, the continued presence of mice in the FCO main building has given my officials "paws" for thought. After careful consideration, we appointed Palmerston the cat last month as chief mouser to the FCO to complement the work of our contractor. I am pleased to report to the House that he has settled in "purr-fectly" and is performing his duties more than satisfactorily.

**Mr Speaker:** I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on following my excellent example in Speaker's House, where for five years we have had a first-class cat who has done the necessary. Its name, of course, is Order. [Laughter.]

**Mr Simpson:** I am sure the whole House will welcome the Prime Minister's statement, and also the arrival of Palmerston, the FCO's rodent killer, but there is a serious point here. May I ask my right hon. Friend whether Palmerston has been security cleared or not? He may recall that the Chancellor's cat, Freya, had access to the Foreign Office and No. 10 Downing Street, and it was thought that she might have been "got at" by a foreign power. May I ask him: has Palmerston been positively vetted by the security service and scanned for bugs by GCHQ? Can my right hon. Friend assure the House, and the more paranoid element of the Brexiters, of Palmerston's British provenance and that he is not a long-term mole working for the EU Commission?

**Mr Hammond:** He is definitely not a mole and I can "cat-egorically" assure my right hon. Friend that Palmerston has been regularly vetted. As for being a sleeper, he is definitely a sleeper—I am told very often in my office. But unlike Freya, who went missing for two years, his attendance record has been 100%. My experts tell me that that pretty much rules out the possibility of him being a Commission employee. I should also tell the House that while Palmerston has so far caught only three mice, his Twitter account, "Diplomog" has attracted 8,158 followers, with a rate of growth that implies he will overtake me by the summer recess.

### Egypt: Human Rights

13. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions he has had with his Egyptian counterpart on the human rights situation in that country. [905051]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Ministers and senior officials regularly raise human rights concerns with our Egyptian counterparts. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed these issues with President Sisi during his visit to the UK in November. I regularly raise our concerns with the Egyptian ambassador, most recently on 17 May.

**Mr Carmichael:** I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Ibrahim Halawa, an Irish national who has been in custody now for 1,000 days, faces a possible death penalty for being caught up in a pro-democracy demonstration. He is just one person in a concerted crackdown by Egyptian authorities against those who defend human rights. Will the Minister make every effort, when speaking to the Egyptian Government, to impress on them the view that we hold, which is that this is unacceptable?

**Mr Ellwood:** If I may, Mr Speaker, I would like to pay my condolences on the loss of aircraft EgyptAir MS804, yet another disaster for Egypt. The whole House will want to share their thoughts and prayers.

Tourism is very important for Egypt. The right hon. Gentleman touches on freedom of expression, and people will be watching Egypt carefully. I raised the matter of Ahmed Abdullah when I met the ambassador on 17 May. I will continue to press for greater freedom of expression in Egypt.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I share the condolences expressed by the Minister.

Human rights in Egypt are deteriorating rapidly. Giulio Regeni, a Cambridge University student, was tortured and killed in Egypt while conducting academic research. This happened during the British-Egyptian year of academic co-operation. Does the Minister accept that killing an academic marks a fundamental attack on academic freedom? Will the Minister explain why the murder of a British-based academic was not raised by the Prime Minister's special envoy on a visit to specifically discuss academic co-operation?

**Mr Ellwood:** We debated these matters in detail in a very productive Westminster Hall debate. The hon. Lady will be aware, as will the House, that Giulio Regeni was an Italian citizen and that therefore it is appropriate and right that the Italians take the lead. We have worked closely with, and provided support to, the Italians as they have pursued the matter, however, and have raised it with Egyptian officials as well.

### Topical Questions

T1. [905027] **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** My priorities for 2016 are the campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, managing our relations with Russia and seeking to protect the rules-based international system, as well as, of course, ensuring Britain's continued membership of, and leadership in, the EU.

**James Berry:** Last year, after the Prime Minister's historic visit to Jaffna, the UN Human Rights Council passed a consensual resolution on accountability and reconciliation, following the atrocities at the end of the Sir Lankan civil war. When the resolution comes back before the UN in June, will our Government do whatever they can to ensure that Sri Lanka lives up to its promises? Progress to date has been slow to non-existent.

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I start by offering my heartfelt condolences to the people of Sri Lanka affected by the terrible floods and landslides that have hit so much of the country. I expressed that message personally to Foreign Minister Samaraweera last week.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights will give his assessment of progress at the next meeting of the UNHRC in Geneva in June. Before then, I myself will visit Geneva to discuss with him how we can encourage and support the Government to deliver fully against their commitments. We recognise that there is still much more to be done, and the UK will continue to support and encourage the Sri Lankan Government to deliver fully against their commitments.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Amnesty International reported this week that unexploded British-made BL-755 cluster submunitions have been found in Hayran, Yemen. We know what these weapons can do, especially to children, who mistake them for toys. Amnesty also reports that on 1 March two children near the

village of Fard were herding goats when they found some other cluster bomblets. They played with them until one went off, killing the eight-year-old and severely injuring the 11-year-old. Does the Foreign Secretary regard the use of cluster bombs in civilian areas as a breach of international humanitarian law?

**Mr Philip Hammond:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the UK has long since given up the use of cluster munitions. Their use or supply is illegal under British law. As the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), said earlier, the weapons described were manufactured decades ago, but the Ministry of Defence is urgently investigating the allegations, and I believe there will be an urgent question on this subject shortly.

**Hilary Benn:** I am grateful for that reply. As the House knows, we are a signatory to the convention banning the use of cluster munitions, but sadly Saudi Arabia is not. It is alleged that this particular type of BL-755 was designed to be dropped from one specific jet—the UK-manufactured Tornado used by the Saudi air force. Under the cluster munitions convention, member states should

“make...best efforts to discourage States not party to this Convention from using cluster munitions.”

What steps has the right hon. Gentleman taken to discourage the use of British-made cluster munitions mounted on British-made jets by Saudi Arabia—an ally with which we have extensive military co-operation—and will he now commit to suspending arms sales to Saudi Arabia and to making the strongest possible representations that it must cease the use of cluster munitions in this conflict?

**Mr Hammond:** We need to be careful. There is no evidence yet that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions. The right hon. Gentleman is right that Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the convention banning cluster munitions, but nor is the United States. We have always made it clear to the Saudi Arabians that we cannot support the use of cluster munitions in any circumstances, as to do so would be unlawful for Ministers and officials in this country. We believe we have an assurance from Saudi Arabia that cluster munitions have not been used in the conflict, but as I said earlier, the MOD is urgently investigating the allegations. I am sure that my ministerial colleague will have more to say in response to the UQ.

T3. [905029] **Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): What specific commitments can the Government make to support Burundian civil society organisations in their peace-building efforts in light of the need to foster and strengthen social cohesion among Burundian communities from conflicting political, ethnic and social groups?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** Through the conflict, stability and security fund, we are seeking to reduce the impunity and address the causes of conflict. We are working with the Burundians in general and with the international community, the country’s human rights commission, the truth and reconciliation commission and the court system. I met human rights organisations

in private in Bujumbura in December to hear their detailed concerns, and I addressed the UN Security Council in March. I am pleased to report that the Arusha talks have now started under the chairmanship of former Tanzanian President Mkapa. I look forward to hearing reports about how they are going.

T2. [905028] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Last year, Nepal suffered a major earthquake, which badly injured the country’s spirit. In the meantime, the world has contributed hugely to rebuild the nation. At the same time, Nepal has adopted a new constitution. What support have the Government given to Nepal to help with the implementation of its new constitution?

**Mr Swire:** The February amendments to the constitution were a significant moment for Nepal, as I think the hon. Gentleman would agree, and a step towards resolving long-standing differences. We continue to encourage peaceful dialogue and compromise to reach a political situation that meets the concerns of all Nepali citizens. I discussed this most recently with Nepal’s deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kamal Thapa, in London on 27 April.

T6. [905032] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What assessment has the Minister for Africa made of the International Monetary Fund’s regional economic outlook and the opportunity of the result to tackle extremism in the region?

**James Duddridge:** As a region, sub-Saharan Africa has seen uninterrupted economic growth over the last 20 years. The IMF regional economic outlook for sub-Saharan Africa projects a growth rate of 3% on average across the continent. Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Senegal are all expecting to grow well in excess of double that figure, with the Ivory Coast growing from 8% to a potentially staggering 10% growth annually. Africa clearly continues to offer some great investment opportunities for UK business.

T4. [905030] **Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): What recent representations has the Minister made to his counterparts in the Nigerian Government on the continued detention of the British citizen Nnamdi Kanu of the indigenous people of Biafra? Is the Minister confident that Nnamdi is receiving all his rights under international law?

**James Duddridge:** I have continued representations with the Nigerian Government on Biafran and other issues and I will continue to do so. I have met a series of Members of Parliament who have constituency interests in Biafra, and I am happy to continue to do so. The British Government recognise Nigeria as a geographic area that holds together as one country, not as separate countries.

T7. [905033] **Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): The 26th of June will mark one year since the attack on holiday makers on the beach at Sousse, resulting in the loss of 38 lives, with 39 people wounded. What is the Minister doing to assist families in marking this anniversary in peace? What are the Government doing to assist the Tunisian Government in promoting security and the country’s economy?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** My hon. Friend is right to raise the devastating impact of this attack on the Tunisian economy. We are working very closely to provide support to the country's policing in order to secure its borders. We are doing all we can to support the Britons affected by the bombs—whether it be the families of the bereaved, those who were injured in the attack or even those who saw what happened and need psychological support. We held a commemoration service in April.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): As “Project Fear” reaches dizzy new heights, the Prime Minister and certain members of this Government are making clear on a daily basis the potentially disastrous consequences of Scotland and the UK leaving the EU. Given that, will the Secretary of State confirm why this Government have taken our country into such a precarious position?

**Mr Philip Hammond:** If the hon. Lady is asking why we are holding a referendum, it is because the British people are entitled to have their say on this important issue. For 40 years, their voice has been ignored, and because we have a Conservative Government, they will now have their say on 23 June. I hope that we politicians will listen to what they say and will accept their verdict.

T8. [905034] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for the Philippines, may I ask my right hon. Friend to join me in congratulating President Rodrigo Duterte on his victory, wishing him well, and finding a mutually convenient time to meet him?

**Mr Swire:** I congratulate the Filipinos on their vibrant show of democracy. Mayor Duterte has received a strong mandate from the electorate, who want greater prosperity and security in the years ahead. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the Philippines in January, and plans for further ministerial visits will be made after the new Government take office on 30 June.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Secretary of State tell us how remaining in the European Union gives us stronger control in finding solutions to issues such as population migration, which are often caused by conflict and the results of climate change?

**Mr Philip Hammond:** Working with our partners in the European Union on such complex and long-term issues clearly reinforces our ability to have effect. In my nearly two years as Foreign Secretary, I have visited more than 70 countries in six continents, and in none of those countries has anyone ever suggested to me that Britain's voice would be more influential if we were outside the European Union. Quite the opposite: being in the European Union means that our influence is augmented, not diminished.

T9. [905036] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): In 2010, the Prime Minister said:

“I am here to make the case for Turkey's membership of the European Union and to fight for it.”

In 2014, he said:

“In terms of Turkish membership of the EU, I very much support that.”

Is the Foreign Secretary really claiming that we should take it from those words that the Government intend to veto Turkey's accession to the EU—and, if there is no remote prospect of its joining the EU, why is so much taxpayers' money being spent on preparing it for accession?

**Mr Hammond:** Turkey applied to join the European Union in 1987, and, as the Prime Minister observed—I think—yesterday, given the current rate of progress it will be decades, if not longer, before it gets anywhere near EU membership. However, there is a benefit for us in seeing Turkey on a European-facing path, and thus under pressure to improve human rights and compliance with the rule of law. If we do not keep that path open, we shall not have that leverage.

Ultimately, though, we have a veto. [*Interruption.*] We have a veto over the terms and conditions on which any applicant country is able to join the European Union, and we have made it absolutely clear that there can be no question of further accessions and access to free movement within the European Union until an applicant country has reached the average level of GDP per capita across the European Union. That means no more poverty gradient in the EU. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** I think we all know that the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) cannot be vetoed. He never has been, and he never will be.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): Earlier questions have referred to the middle east, and to deploring extremism wherever it may be found. Is it not a matter of grave concern that the new Israeli Defence Minister is extremely right-wing and ultra-nationalist? He said last year that what he described as “disloyal” Israeli Arabs should be beheaded. Does that not illustrate how far the Israeli Government have gone in their extremism and their rejection of any idea of a two-state solution, and should that not be condemned?

**Mr Hammond:** It is a matter of grave concern. The polarisation of views in Israel/Palestine makes it less likely that we shall be able to achieve the two-state solution that the House and most of the world so ardently crave, and harder for us to do so.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): In answer to a written parliamentary question from me, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury reported that on 16 January £657 million of frozen Iranian assets had been unfrozen, and therefore returned to Iran or Iranian citizens. What are the Government doing to monitor those funds and ensure that they are spent correctly, rather than being handed over to terrorists or funding action against British troops?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend asks two separate questions. First, we are committed to the unfreezing of Iranian assets. Some who were opposed to the joint comprehensive plan of action—JCPOA—agreement with Iran suggested that up to \$150 billion would flow back to Iran in short order, but to date we think that the process has managed to achieve about \$11 billion. Secondly, there are of course international agreements in place to

monitor and prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorist organisations, and those apply to Iran as much as to any other country.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): What is the Foreign Secretary's assessment of the growing violations of press freedom in Tunisia?

**Mr Ellwood:** As I said earlier, Tunisia is going through a difficult period at the moment. It has been subjected to a number of terrorist attacks and attempted attacks.

We have almost doubled the size of our embassy there, and we are doing our best to ensure that we provide support during this difficult period. I would be happy to discuss in more detail some of the challenges relating to freedom of the press with the hon. Lady outside the Chamber.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to disappoint colleagues, but we must now move on.

## Yemen: Cluster Munitions

12.35 pm

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on reports of new evidence that UK-manufactured cluster bombs may have killed and injured civilians, including children, in the conflict in Yemen.

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne)**: The United Kingdom last provided BL755 cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia nearly 30 years ago; the final delivery was in 1989. We ratified the convention on cluster munitions on 4 May 2010 and we no longer supply, maintain or support these weapons. We have not done so since we signed the convention in 2008. Based on all the information available to us, including sensitive coalition operational reporting, we assess that no UK-supplied cluster weapons have been used, and that no UK-supplied aircraft have been involved in the use of UK cluster weapons, in the current conflict in Yemen.

We are aware of reports of the alleged use of cluster munitions by the coalition in Yemen. We have raised their use during the current conflict in Yemen several times with the Saudi Arabian authorities and, in line with our obligations under the convention on cluster munitions, we continue to encourage Saudi Arabia, as a non-party to the convention, to accede to it. The Saudis have previously denied using UK cluster munitions during the conflict in Yemen, but we are seeking fresh assurances in the light of this serious new allegation.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh**: Amnesty International yesterday sent a letter to the Prime Minister calling for an urgent investigation into the scandal of UK-supplied BL-755 cluster bombs being used in villages in northern Yemen. Amnesty stated:

“During recent field research in Sa’da, Hajjah, and Sanaa governorates near the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border, Amnesty found a partially-exploded UK-manufactured “BL-755” cluster bomb, as well as other evidence of US and Brazilian cluster munitions which had been used by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces.”

I note the Minister’s remarks, but the discovery of the cluster bomb—originally manufactured in the UK in the 1970s—is clear evidence that, as has long been suspected, members of the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition have used British cluster munitions in their highly controversial attacks in Yemen.

The European Parliament voted in February by a large majority for an EU-wide ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, citing the “disastrous humanitarian situation” as a result of the “Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen”.

Further to this, under a 2008 code of conduct, EU member states promised not to sell weapons to countries where they might be used to

“commit serious violations of international humanitarian law and to undermine regional peace, security and stability”.

With that in mind, will the UK Government now finally suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia and properly investigate the issues raised by Amnesty International? Will the Secretary of State now confirm that the Government will keep their commitment to the EU not

to export in these tragic circumstances? Finally, will he now apologise to the House for this Government’s continued inaction on this vital matter, given that the continued use of British bombs has resulted in the deaths of Yemeni men, women and children?

**Mr Dunne**: The Government recognise the seriousness of the allegation and have therefore requested that the Saudi authorities reconfirm any evidence suggesting that UK munitions have been involved in the way alleged. We have no evidence of that at present. As I have said already, we have not supplied any such munitions for a long time. There have been seven conflicts in the border area between Saudi Arabia and northern Yemen over the past decade, and it is unclear from the evidence provided thus far that the munitions came from the current conflict.

As for the other issues mentioned by the hon. Lady, we have been clear that the role of the United Kingdom’s advisors to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s armed forces in this conflict is not operational. We welcome the ceasefire and the negotiations that are under way and have been for the past six weeks or so. We want them to be successful so that the cessation of hostilities continues to result in no further conflict in Yemen.

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I am the Government’s special envoy to Yemen and have been there many times over a period of 30 years. I have more recently been to Saudi Arabia, where the Yemeni Government are based. I have also been to the operational targeting headquarters of the Saudi-led coalition and have seen for myself the high professional standards being set by that operation. Notwithstanding the passion of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), which I think it is fair to say is driven much more by non-governmental organisation briefing than by any kind of personal experience—

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh**: How insulting.

**Sir Alan Duncan**: It is not at all insulting to suggest that experience of the country matters. I make a plea to the hon. Lady: would it not be wise for the House to appreciate that the current cessation of hostilities and the peace talks in Kuwait are in an absolutely critical phase? The future of the country entirely depends on the talks, so it would also be wise not to inflame any kind of opinion that could jeopardise those talks, empowering those who would rather them fail than succeed.

**Mr Dunne**: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who speaks with considerable experience on matters Yemeni as the Prime Minister’s envoy to the country, which he visits, along with its neighbours, more often than most other Members. I gently remind Opposition Members who are rightly concerned about the impact of certain munitions in this conflict that, were it not for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia establishing the coalition following UN resolution 2216, it is highly likely that Yemen would have been entirely overrun and would be in a state of continuous chaos.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): We have all read the reports from Yemen in recent days of cluster bombs in such volumes in civilian

areas that they are hanging off the trees, and of young children herding goats and picking up the bombs, thinking they are toys, with all-too-familiar results. Anyone who read those reports will be asking questions today and will be rightly concerned about the Minister's lack of answers.

We need to know whether the Saudi military has used British planes to drop cluster bombs. What is the extent of British involvement in the conflict, and what precisely is it designed to achieve? Today's *Los Angeles Times* reports a US State Department official as having said that the United States has reminded Saudi Arabia of its obligations regarding the use of cluster bombs and encouraged it

“to do its utmost to avoid civilian casualties”.

Will the Minister confirm whether he has also raised such concerns with his Saudi counterparts? What response has he received? In the face of all the mounting evidence, we have the absurd spectacle of the Saudi spokesman, Brigadier General Ahmed Asseri, insisting that the coalition is not using cluster bombs. Does the Minister believe the brigadier general? If not, what is he going to do about it, and when?

**Mr Dunne:** We regard the reports as serious. We are seeking to investigate, through our discussions with the Saudis, any further evidence to substantiate the allegations that have been made. I can categorically reassure the hon. Lady and this House that no British planes have been involved in this coalition effort at all, let alone in dropping cluster munitions—that is the potential allegation. There is no British involvement in the coalition in targeting or weaponising aircraft to undertake missions.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who deals with the middle east, was in Doha yesterday, where he met the United Nations envoy for Yemen. He has impressed upon him the need to continue with the delicate negotiations under way in Yemen.

**Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): The Secretary of State and Ministers will be aware of the inquiry being held by the Committees on Arms Export Controls, on the conflict in Yemen. Will the Minister commit to submitting further evidence, not least evidence on cluster bombs and evidence from Saudi Arabia, to the Committees as soon as it becomes available?

**Mr Dunne:** I joined other Ministers in appearing before my hon. Friend's Committee recently—a novel experience that I hope was satisfactory to its members. I am happy to undertake that, should we receive further evidence as a result of our inquiries into the use of cluster munitions, we will provide it to the Committees.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): This Government have truly got their head stuck in the sand. Yemen faces one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, yet through their continuing sale of arms to Saudi Arabia the UK Government are exacerbating the plight of the Yemeni people. The Scottish National party's alternative Queen's Speech called for a regulation of weapons trading Bill, which would seek to regulate the arms treaties that the UK Government might sign. That is the right and transparent approach to such

deals, which the UK Government must follow. Does the Minister agree that it is a disgrace that since this Prime Minister took office in 2010 the UK Government have licensed £6.7 billion of arms to Saudi Arabia, including £2.8 billion since the bombing of Yemen began in March last year? Is our arms trade with Saudi Arabia worth so much more than the thousands of men, women and children involved in and dying in this terrible conflict? This Government have questions to answer, with evidence mounting that they have breached international law. When will a full inquiry get under way?

**Mr Dunne:** I ask the hon. Lady to consider her last remarks. There is no suggestion—none whatsoever—that the United Kingdom or our forces are involved in breaches of humanitarian law in this conflict. The humanitarian aid provided by this country to refugees as a result of the crisis in Yemen is second in the ranking of countries around the world. We have a proud record of supporting the humanitarian cause of people disturbed by this crisis. As she will probably be aware, the UN estimates that some one fifth of people in need around the world as a result of conflict are in Yemen. We are committed to supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Arms exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent years have primarily been about providing capability to cope with incursion by foreign powers. These exports support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's contribution to the anti-Daesh coalition, in which they play a vital role. The hon. Lady has to look at the challenges in the round in the region and at the role that Saudi Arabia plays in providing continued security to the region.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am sure the Minister would agree that when looking at the Arabian peninsula we sometimes have to be careful what we wish for, as even more conservative forces could replace some of the Governments and some of the organisations there. Without intervention, we would have seen a collapse in Yemen that would have endangered our entire security. Does he agree that this latest incident and the latest allegations show the importance of all nations signing up to the cluster munitions legislation, as the UK already has?

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that this is a very volatile country that has played host to a number of international terrorist organisations, including al-Qaeda. I agree that it is desirable for more countries to sign up to the convention on cluster munitions. We have encouraged our friends in Saudi Arabia to do so on several occasions.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Doubts have been cast on the validity of the evidence produced by Amnesty and others, but I and other hon. Members have seen a series of photographs and evidence that suggest that cluster munitions are being used in Yemen. Amnesty has told us that it was impossible to obtain more information because three of the de-miners were killed in a cluster munitions incident while carrying out their work, which itself suggests that cluster munitions are being used. Will the Minister explain whether he has seen all the evidence from Amnesty? Will he commit to reviewing it independently, and not just relying on Saudi assurances?

[Stephen Doughty]

Has the Minister had any answers to the series of other serious allegations that have been made not just by Amnesty, but by Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, Human Rights Watch and other organisations about attacks on civilians and humanitarian facilities, which the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), admitted he had not had satisfactory answers to when he appeared before the Committees on Arms Export Controls?

**Mr Dunne:** I am not casting doubt on the photographic evidence. The challenge is to determine where and when the munitions were laid, and by whom. There is very little evidence at this point. We are taking this matter up with the Saudi authorities. We are particularly concerned about the potential evidence of any UK munitions that might have been used in this way. As I have indicated, if we find any evidence, we will pass it on to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, on which the hon. Gentleman sits. In relation to the questions that he posed to me and the other people who appeared before the Committees the other day about the extent of the investigations into other matters that we are reviewing and on which we are seeking information from the Saudi authorities, I am not aware that any further information has been forthcoming since we met the Committees a couple of weeks ago.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question to the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh)? This is a very serious matter and I am glad that there will be an investigation of the serious allegations that have been made by Amnesty International.

We are involved in Yemen because we are peacemakers: we want to see peace restored to a country that is bleeding to death because of the involvement of so many countries. Of course, we needed the support of the Saudi Arabians to restore the legitimate Government of President Hadi because of the actions of the Iranians. However, it is important that they now stop and support the ceasefire. These kinds of allegations undermine the work that has been done by the coalition. Will the Minister ensure that the Saudi Arabian ambassador is called to see the Foreign Office Minister so that we can reinforce the message that these kinds of allegations undermine the peace process, which we need to make sure is maintained?

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has taken a consistent interest in Yemen for many years, for pointing out that the coalition effort in Yemen began at the invitation of President Saleh—

**Keith Vaz:** President Hadi.

**Mr Dunne:** Sorry, President Hadi. It is therefore a fully legitimised operation. The right hon. Gentleman is right that the primary aim of the efforts of the United Kingdom Government is to ensure that peace is restored to the country. To that end, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), meets the Saudi ambassador routinely. He last saw him

last week and continually impresses upon him the importance of the negotiations in Kuwait. We are seeking to assist those negotiations to the extent that we can.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): In his earlier reply, the Minister mentioned that we have not supplied munitions for a long time. Will he clarify the date when we last supplied munitions?

**Mr Dunne:** In my response to the urgent question, I made it clear that 1989 was the last time we supplied any BL-755 munitions.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Government are digging a very deep hole for themselves. I have exchanged many letters with Ministers on this subject and have been informed that the UK Government have concluded that the

“Saudi-led Coalition are not targeting civilians”

in Yemen. How can the Government draw that conclusion when the Saudis have stated that whole cities—Sa’dah, where UN Security Council experts identified that hospitals, schools and mosques had been attacked, and Marran—are military targets; when the Saudis are apparently using UK-made cluster munitions; and when 93% of the casualties from air-launched explosives are civilians, according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs? Will the Government finally acquire a backbone, accept that Saudi Arabia is in flagrant breach of international humanitarian law and halt weapons sales to Saudi Arabia until it cleans up its act?

**Mr Dunne:** This is a civil war and in civil wars, difficult things happen. This is a very complex environment. Actors use whatever is available to them, in respect of the terrain that is there, to adopt positions. It is not a nice, straightforward, clinical exercise like a training event. Therefore, accidents do happen. As a result of our relationship with the Saudi Arabian armed forces, we are in a position to exert some influence on the coalition and, in particular, its leadership in respect of investigating accidents when they occur and allegations of incidents such as those that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned. We are putting that pressure on the Saudis and they have given us undertakings that they are undertaking those investigations, and we are awaiting the outcome.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Thanks to a Labour Government, we have the Export Control Act 2002, which provides this country with a robust mechanism for arms exports not just to Saudi Arabia, but to other nations around the world. Will the Minister tell the House what pressure is being put on the Iranians to stop not only exporting weapons to rebels, but using them as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia?

**Mr Dunne:** The hon. Gentleman, who is experienced in these matters, will be aware of the coalition’s efforts to intercept matériel that foreign Governments, in particular Iran, are seeking to supply to rebels through the waters surrounding Yemen. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the Iranian chargé d’affaires last week to raise that specific issue. We will continue to put diplomatic pressure on the Iranians to cease their support for the rebels.



**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, thank the Minister for his response. Along with the Chair of the Defence Committee, I attended the Committees on Arms Export Controls, where there was a robust exchange of views, as the Minister will recall. The use of British-produced cluster bombs was mentioned in that evidence session, and he has referred to that. In his response to the Committees, the Minister stated that if evidence was produced of British-produced cluster bombs being used, there would be sanctions and the Government would stop arms exports to Saudi Arabia. More evidence has been produced today and I ask the Minister the same thing. Will we take action today to ensure that the exports to Saudi Arabia stop, because the evidence clearly shows the use of British-produced cluster bombs?

**Mr Dunne:** Again, the hon. Gentleman has taken a consistent interest in this subject and plays an important role on the Committees. I repeat what I said to the Committees, which is that we at the Ministry of Defence provide advice to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which is the entity within the UK Government that provides arms export licences. Our advice will be shaped by the circumstances at the time. At present, we have an allegation of the use of a UK munition. Until such time as we have established whether that munition has been used by a member of the coalition as part of the current conflict, we will not be in a position to speculate on what might happen to future licence applications.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have a detailed investigation of exactly what was dropped and when, because we all know that munitions can come to light many years after conflicts? For example, we are still finding bombs from the second world war in Britain. Does he agree that such an investigation is also important because this is a close ally acting in self-defence of a Government that are entitled to run the country? It is therefore not a straight matter of condemnation.

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for pointing out that munitions have quite a long shelf life. As I indicated, it is quite possible that the munitions that are the subject of this allegation are a relic of previous conflicts in the area, of which there have been seven over the past 10 years.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Britain was right to join other countries in banning cluster bombs. It is clear that, in this matter, Saudi Arabia has questions to answer, and the Minister has mentioned several times the representations the Government have made to the Saudi Arabians. Will he help me by explaining what work he is doing alongside other countries in multilateral institutions to bring the Saudi Arabians into the consensus against cluster bombs?

**Mr Dunne:** As a signatory to the convention, we encourage non-signatories with which we have close military relations to consider acceding to the terms of the convention or joining it themselves. Through our offices at the UN, there are periodic dialogues with countries that are not, as yet, signatories to the convention, and we will continue to support those discussions.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned the investigations the Saudi Government have agreed to undertake into strikes in civilian areas. Could he give us a timetable for when he expects to hear the result of those investigations?

**Mr Dunne:** We are looking at all the allegations made by the various bodies mentioned in the Chamber, and we have the opportunity to indicate to the Saudi military that these incidents are worthy of investigation. This is an ongoing process, and we have had opportunities to encourage the Saudis to speed up their investigations. However, at this point, I am afraid that I cannot put a timetable on it.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is clear that these munitions are old, but they are falling now, and they are affecting families and others living in Yemen. Does the Minister not agree that the Government have a responsibility—certainly a moral responsibility—to provide training and resources to the services on the ground in Yemen that are trying to de-mine these areas so that people can live in safety without having to fear for their children's lives?

**Mr Dunne:** The hon. Lady referred to munitions falling. We do not know at this point when, where or how the munitions referred to in the allegations were delivered. It is that kind of information that will help to inform the investigation and what is then done about it. In relation to clearing up the munitions that clearly do exist in northern Yemen, we are supporting a number of non-governmental organisations by providing resource and training to encourage them to undertake this very important work.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I earnestly hope that the hon. Lady was here at the start of the statement.

**Dr Mathias** *indicated assent*.

**Mr Speaker:** That is good enough for me.

**Dr Mathias:** Following on from the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), will the Minister tell me what happened to the existing UK-manufactured cluster bombs when the UK signed the convention on cluster munitions?

**Mr Dunne:** I can help my hon. Friend. The last munitions were supplied to Saudi Arabia in 1989. The convention was signed in 2008; at that point, although it did not come into effect until May 2010, we ceased supplying or supporting those weapons any further.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) on bringing the Minister to the Dispatch Box to answer this urgent question. The fact that these cluster munitions seem to have been modelled and designed in the 1970s underlines the historical defence relationship between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Over that time, possibly thousands of UK personnel have found

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

themselves advising the Saudi Arabian armed forces or leaving the United Kingdom services to take up a role in the Saudi Arabian armed services. How confident, therefore, are the Government that no UK citizen has been involved in targeting, firing or maintaining these illegal weapons while in the service of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

**Mr Dunne:** Completely confident.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Once again, we have Ministers prepared to present the Saudi wolf in a sheepdog's clothing. Today, we have been given a pub crawl of excusery. We have been told that the weapons were old or that there was no evidence of any cluster munitions having been used by the Saudi-led coalition. Then we were told that there was no evidence they were British manufactured. Then the Minister told us that he was concerned and that he would try to get evidence. Rather than just asking the Saudis what they have done, will the Government contact the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, which actually recovered the matériel we are talking about and has it in a de-mining depot, and look at the same evidence that Amnesty International has examined?

**Mr Dunne:** I would gently remind the hon. Gentleman that we are not members of this coalition. We do not have locus in Yemen to undertake direct investigations ourselves. What we are talking about are alleged violations of international humanitarian law. The correct procedure when an incident has been brought to the attention of members of the coalition is for them to undertake the investigation itself. We are able to encourage and stimulate them to undertake that investigation, because there is a long-standing relationship between our respective armed forces. That is what we are doing, and that is the right way to proceed.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): If these reports are not enough, under what circumstances would the Government actually suspend sales of arms to Saudi Arabia?

**Mr Dunne:** This is an allegation. There are a number of allegations of potential violations of international humanitarian law. If investigations lead to clear evidence, that evidence will have to be taken into account whenever an arms export licence is presented and where that information is relevant.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): The shocking statistics referred to a few moments ago make it clear that the deaths of civilians in Yemen are not an isolated, unfortunate accident. The Saudis are, at best, being recklessly indiscriminate; at worst, they are deliberately setting out to kill civilians. Does the Minister agree that we should not hide behind the assertion that we cannot prove that British weapons have been used in this act of mass murder? Does he agree that the only way to ensure that they are not used in this way is to call an immediate halt to all arms sales to Saudi Arabia until the allegations have been proven unfounded, rather than to wait for the allegations to be proven correct?

**Mr Dunne:** Such a call would, of course, have no impact on the use of weapons that have already been supplied, so it would not achieve what the hon. Gentleman looks to do. The answer is that we are using our influence on the Saudi Arabians to encourage them to undertake investigations in circumstances where there has been conflict on the ground. This has been a war environment; difficult things happen in wars, and it is not possible to be absolutely certain about everything that takes place in such an environment. That is why it is important to investigate these allegations of actions that appear to be in breach of international humanitarian law.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister said that no UK-made planes had dropped UK-made cluster bombs. [HON. MEMBERS: "UK planes."] Sorry, UK planes. Just to be clear, will he confirm whether UK planes have dropped any cluster bombs at all?

**Mr Dunne:** There are no UK Royal Air Force planes involved in the coalition, and there are no cluster munitions in the arsenal of the British armed forces.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Given the grave concerns raised, will the UK Government now heed the recommendation of the International Development Committee and back the establishment of an independent investigation into alleged breaches of humanitarian law in Yemen?

**Mr Dunne:** There is a clear process under which the Saudis, as leaders of the coalition, undertake the investigation. That is a novel aspect of this conflict. The Saudis have not done that before in previous conflicts in which they have been engaged. We think that that is appropriate, as do all other nations.

## Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update

1.10 pm

### **The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I want to update the House on the counter-Daesh campaign following the December and February statements by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the International Development Secretary. Since then, the attacks in Brussels in March have reminded us of the importance of defeating this terror. Since the decisive vote to extend air strikes to Syria, we have stepped up our air campaign, and today I want to set out the United Kingdom's contribution to military operations and our wider efforts to defeat Daesh.

We now have 1,100 military personnel in the region on this campaign. I know the House will want to join me in paying tribute to them and to their families who are not with them. The RAF has conducted over 760 airstrikes in Iraq and, since December, 43 in Syria—more than any nation except the United States. As well as providing close air support, we have been targeting Daesh's communications, command and control, and infrastructure, and also providing crucial intelligence and surveillance. In Iraq, we have over 250 troops who have trained more than 13,000 members of the Iraqi security forces, mainly in countering improvised explosive devices. The extra troops I announced in March have now started to deploy—22 Engineer Regiment from Wiltshire is providing bridge building training, while the MOD hospital unit from Northallerton is providing medical expertise.

The military campaign is making progress. In Iraq, Daesh is on the back foot: it has lost territory, its finances have been targeted, and its leadership has been struck. About 40% of the territory that Daesh once held has been retaken, including Ramadi; last month, Hit; and, more recently, Rutbah. Preparatory operations for the encirclement of Mosul are under way and, at the weekend, Prime Minister Abadi announced the beginning of the operation to retake Fallujah.

In Syria, the civil war, the persistence of Daesh, and Russia's intervention have created a more complex situation. Despite the so-called cessation of hostilities, the regime has continued to hammer the moderate opposition. In Aleppo, hospitals and schools have been repeatedly shelled. On 4 May, the United Kingdom called an urgent session of the UN Security Council to highlight the regime's atrocities. Russia, the Assad regime's protector, must apply pressure to end this violence. None the less, even in Syria, Daesh has lost ground and has been driven from al-Shaddadi—a major supply route from Mosul to Raqqa. Coalition airstrikes have destroyed an estimated \$800 million-worth of Daesh cash stockpiles, while the RAF has struck oilfields in eastern Syria—a major source of revenue. We need to build on this progress. Earlier this month, I and other coalition Defence Ministers reviewed what further support we can offer, and we are looking at what more the UK can do.

Daesh cannot be defeated by military means alone. That brings me to the wider strategy. First, on counter-ideology, the UK has led the creation of a coalition communications cell to undermine Daesh's failing proposition that it is winning militarily, that it is building a viable state, and that it represents the only true form

of Islam. Some in the media have criticised our proactive efforts to discredit Daesh's perverted ideology. I say to the House that we make no apology for seeking to stop people being radicalised and stop them becoming Daesh suicide bombers or foot soldiers.

Secondly, we are supporting political reform and reconciliation in Iraq, and the ending of the civil war in Syria and the transition of Assad from power. We are helping to stabilise areas liberated from Daesh so that people can return to a safe environment. We have contributed to UN-led efforts to remove IEDs, to increase water availability to above pre-conflict levels in Tikrit, and to rebuild schools, police stations and electricity generators across Anbar and Nineveh provinces.

In Syria, long-term success means a political settlement which delivers a Government who can represent all Syrians and with whom we can work to tackle Daesh. Last week, the International Syria Support Group reaffirmed its determination to strengthen the cessation of hostilities, and set a deadline of 1 June for full humanitarian access to besieged areas. It is concerning that despite this agreement, attacks have continued, and that armed groups are on the brink of withdrawal from the cessation. We support the UN special envoy in his efforts to resume Syrian peace negotiations, the success of which depends on respect for the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access, and discussion of transition by both sides.

Thirdly, the UK is playing a full role, alongside our partners, in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria. At the London conference, we doubled our commitment to Syria and the region to £2.3 billion, which has already delivered over 20 million food rations and relief items for over 4.5 million people—but there remain 13.5 million people in need inside Syria. The regime continues to remove vital medical supplies from aid convoys, in violation of international law. It is outrageous that aid itself has become a weapon of war.

Fourthly, we are stemming the flow of foreign fighters through better international co-ordination. At least 50 countries now pass fighter profiles to Interpol—a 400% increase over two years. We estimate that the number of foreign fighters joining Daesh has now fallen to about 200 a month from its peak of about 2,000 a month.

As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we have seen new branches appear, most concerningly in Libya. The Foreign Secretary visited Tripoli last month to reiterate our support for Prime Minister al-Sarraj. Yesterday I spoke to the new Libyan Defence Minister to repeat our offer of assistance to the new Government of national accord. Last Monday, the international community reaffirmed its support for that new Government and underlined the need for enhanced co-ordination between legitimate Libyan security forces to fight Daesh and UN-designated terrorist groups. Britain would provide training or other support only at the invitation of the Libyan Government or by other authority. Let me reiterate to the House that there are no plans to deploy troops in a combat role.

Since this House supported extending military operations, we have intensified our efforts to defeat Daesh. There is a long way to go, and political progress needs to match military progress on the ground, but we can be encouraged.

[Michael Fallon]

This may be a long campaign, but it is one we have to win and one we will win. I commend this statement to the House.

1.18 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I start by joining the Secretary of State in recognising the extraordinary bravery and commitment of the men and women of our armed forces? I welcome much of what he has said. Daesh and those who fight alongside it are barbaric and hateful terrorists, and they must be stopped. I was surprised, however, that there was not recognition from the Secretary of State of the terrible news of the suicide bombings in Syrian strongholds that caused so many fatalities yesterday. That obviously serves as a reminder that progress cannot be measured only in terms of the size of Daesh-held territory. On behalf of the House, may I express all our condolences to the victims of this senseless violence, and their families?

A particularly significant development in Iraq was seen at the weekend with the launch of the ground offensive against the Daesh stronghold of Fallujah. It is often forgotten that about 250 British troops have been deployed on the ground in Iraq, providing vital training and military advice to the Iraqi security forces. We therefore have an important stake in the success of the Iraqi military, and we will continue to monitor their progress very carefully.

As the Secretary of State acknowledges, the situation in Syria is much more complex. Last year, he said that we were going to

“tighten the noose around the head of the snake”

that was Raqqa, but taking the fight to the de facto capital of Daesh in Syria will present many challenges compared with the previous stages of the campaign.

In terms of ground forces, coalition airstrikes to date have been complemented by a number of armed opposition groups on the ground, particularly in northern Syria, but the YPG is unlikely to have a role in Raqqa, I would suggest, given its distance from the majority Kurdish regions. There are questions too about both the numbers and the composition of other armed opposition groups. The House was told last year that the Free Syrian Army, comprising the majority of the 70,000 moderate fighters the Government identified, was going to fight in Syria, but as the Secretary of State said again today, Russian airstrikes have systematically targeted the Free Syrian Army, among other rebel groups opposed to the Assad regime but not thought to be affiliated to Daesh. In fact, there have been reports in the past 24 hours that indicate that the Free Syrian Army may be excluded from the US-led plan to liberate Raqqa. Is that correct? If it is, how are the Government expecting to contribute to the next phase of the campaign without troops of our own on the ground? Do the Government plan to increase co-ordination between coalition efforts and the Assad regime and its Russian allies?

Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that further airstrikes will avoid inflicting civilian casualties, particularly if urban areas such as Raqqa are to be targeted? The statements so far on the latter point have not provided sufficient reassurance. We are told that a review is carried out after each strike to assess the damage, but there are few details of the process involved.

The MOD, we are told, considers all credible reports of civilian casualties, but it is not clear how credibility is defined in that context; nor is it clear how many reports of civilian casualties have been received but not found to be credible, or even how the difficult distinction between combatant and civilian is being made in the first place.

I welcome the progress that has been made in the fight against Daesh in recent weeks. I hope to hear in more detail from the Secretary of State what strategy the Government have for taking the campaign forward.

**Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the tone of her response. She raised three or four specific points.

The hon. Lady is right to draw the attention of the House to suicide bombings. In Iraq, they may to some extent indicate a switch in tactics by Daesh. As it is increasingly pushed west along the Euphrates and north up the Tigris, we have seen suicide explosions in Baghdad and in Syria.

The hon. Lady is also right to draw attention to the operations likely to be needed to liberate both Raqqa and Mosul, which are the main centres currently occupied by Daesh. That will require quite sustained and formidable operations by the local forces on the ground, and nobody should underestimate the difficulty or the timescales involved. However, as I indicated, some progress is being made in north-east and northern Syria, with operations ongoing to try to seal the remaining unsealed pockets of the border and to begin slowly to tighten the noose around Raqqa. Operations have begun to begin to plan how the city of Mosul may be recovered and troops are being moved forward up the Tigris to be ready for that.

The hon. Lady asks about the estimate of 70,000. Our view is that that estimate has stood up. Numbers of that size are still involved in fighting the regime, and the Syrian democratic forces are part of that struggle.

Finally, the hon. Lady asks about civilian casualties. I made it clear to her and the House that we carry out a battle damage assessment after every RAF strike: we look back at the evidence of what the strike actually achieved to satisfy ourselves that that there have been no civilian casualties. We will of course look especially closely at any allegation made and any piece of evidence that comes to light that there may have been civilian casualties, but at the moment, after a year and a half of operations in Iraq and Syria, our view remains that we have seen no evidence yet of civilian casualties being caused by our strikes. That, I suggest, is a tribute to the professionalism of the RAF pilots and crews and to the choice of precision munitions.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Russian media are reporting a Russian statement that a force of 6,000 Jabhat al-Nusra fighters are preparing for an assault on Aleppo. Plainly there is scope for confusion and misinformation about identifying al-Nusra and other opposition forces. Has any work been done by the members of the ISSG to create a joint intelligence picture, so that the capacity for misinformation in that area can be reduced?

**Michael Fallon:** The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who

is responsible for middle east affairs, is already involved in work to build up a better picture. The Chairman of the Select Committee is absolutely right: the picture in and around Aleppo is the most complex of all in terms of the different groups fighting there. He makes a good point about sharing intelligence more widely.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

During the debate in December, we were told that the UK's unique contribution to defeating Daesh was the Brimstone missile and that our coalition partners were pressing the UK to bring it to the conflict. Incidentally, this unique contribution argument continued even after it was shown that the Royal Saudi Air Force had been using Brimstone in Syria since February 2015. Despite that, it remained a central plank of the Government's case for extending UK military action into Syria. Indeed, according to information obtained by *The Huffington Post* under the Freedom of Information Act, until as late as February this year not a single Daesh fighter had been killed by a UK-fired Brimstone missile. The Brimstone missile and its capacity to minimise civilian casualties work best when there is human intelligence on the ground to supply precise information. That explains the other great plank of the Government's case: the 70,000 moderate ground troops who were, we were assured, ready to cut off the head of the Daesh snake in Raqqa.

Today, we are told that the coalition is airdropping leaflets into Raqqa urging the civilian population to flee the city ahead of an imminent attack—the problem of course being that the civilian population of that city are being used as human shields by Daesh, which has threatened to murder anyone attempting to leave the city. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with our coalition partners to decide whether the RAF will take part in the imminent bombing of Raqqa, with its large civilian population?

**Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his questions. They are largely about operational matters, but I will do my best to respond.

The RAF uses a number of precision weapons—Paveway bombs, Hellfire and Brimstone missiles—for different tasks. The Brimstone is particularly suited to striking moving vehicles, for example; the Paveway deals with more static targets, such as command posts. I can tell the House that yesterday the RAF used all three—Paveway, Brimstone and Hellfire. There will be more details of that in due course.

We have never suggested that the RAF would start bombing Raqqa or Mosul indiscriminately. The coalition will have to be extremely careful in its use of close air support as operations begin first to encircle, then eventually to liberate the suburbs and the city centre. Obviously, we want to ensure that as many civilian lives as possible are saved. As we have in the liberation of other cities, the coalition has of course been encouraging citizens to leave, to make sure those lives are spared. We discuss such matters regularly inside the coalition.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A further 29 hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye and I am keen to accommodate all of them on this important statement, the timing of

which was flagged up last week by the Government, but there are also about 30 people seeking to contribute to the subsequent debate, so pithiness personified is what we require.

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who say that we must find some accommodation with Assad because we need to work with him to beat Daesh are missing the point? They need look no further than Darayya on 12 May, where a humanitarian convoy was prevented from entering the town to save the lives of starving children. The brutality of that regime means that we have no chance of working with Assad successfully in the future.

**Michael Fallon:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. The brutality of the Assad regime means that he can play no part in the future of Syria. He and his forces have been using barrel bombs and chlorine, dropping munitions indiscriminately and robbing humanitarian aid convoys of exactly the medicines that the local communities need.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): What progress has been made in cutting off finances to Daesh, apart from the sale of oil, such as that obtained from looted antiquities and the terrible sale of slaves, who are the Yazidi women?

**Michael Fallon:** We have made progress in reducing the dependence of Daesh on illegally traded oil across its borders and also internally in Syria. We have made progress in cutting down the sale of antiques and artefacts in international markets. We have had the strike that I referred to on the cash stockpiles that Daesh has been using to finance itself. Of course, it draws other revenues from the areas it controls, but one illustration of the progress has been consecutive reports that Daesh has begun to cut the pay rates to its own troops.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Nevertheless, Daesh remains the best funded terrorist group in history, despite the fall in the oil price. How confident, therefore, is the Secretary of State that Daesh can no longer access the financial infrastructure and resources of the Iraqi state, given that the Foreign Affairs Committee is still waiting for answers from the Iraqi banking authorities as to Daesh's ability to make a turn on the state's currency markets?

**Michael Fallon:** That is one of the areas that we are working on. When Daesh originally established its caliphate so rapidly, it was able to access finance from the central bank in Mosul and other areas in Iraq, and it levies taxes on the towns and cities that it controls, but I want to assure my hon. Friend that the work is in hand and we are making progress in restricting Daesh's financial support.

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Is it not now clear that the success of the international coalition against ISIS will be limited so long as civilians in Syria continue to be subject to starvation tactics, besiegement and attacks with impunity? Is it not time for a rethink on the UK strategy so that it focuses much more on civilian protection? To that end, has operational planning begun by the Ministry of Defence and the Department for

[Jo Cox]

International Development on supporting the World Food Programme in its deadline of 1 June on airdrops to besieged communities?

**Michael Fallon:** We continue to look at that. The difficulty with airdrops is that they are very difficult to target on the precise population that we want to help. It is difficult to drop water in very large quantities, and at present the United Nations wants, where it can, to get food in through humanitarian convoys, but we will keep that under review.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** Towards the end of last year when I was in Iraq, I was honoured to meet some displaced people in a number of camps. The Secretary of State is right to say that in addition to military action, we need to win the peace. May I therefore have an assurance that when we liberate cities such as Falluja, a key part of the strategy is ensuring that the utilities, water and other things to support civic society will be very much part of our plan?

**Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. We are providing some £80 million in lifesaving humanitarian aid for those who have been forced to flee their homes. The Chancellor announced at the G7 last week that we are contributing some £300 million in loan guarantees to the World Bank's facility to help rebuild and strengthen the economy of Iraq, and we are also contributing to the Iraq humanitarian pooled fund that will help tackle poverty and ensure stability, precisely to get back the essential services on which people depend, to encourage them to return rapidly to the areas that have been liberated.

**Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab):** The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** When selecting and approving targets for deliberate strikes, we take very great care to make sure that they respect the rules of engagement that I set at the beginning of the campaign. A target that is selected may be studied for several days or even weeks to make sure that we understand the pattern of life around it—that it is a building, for example, that civilians are not using and only the military are using. We continue that surveillance right up until the last moment. If civilians are found to be in that area, the strike can be aborted right at the end. We take very good care to minimise civilian casualties. In long campaigns, however, in the messiness of war it is not impossible that there may be civilian casualties at some point. All I can tell the House is that from the evidence so far, we think we have avoided them.

**Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for the quarterly update. What progress has been made in supplying the arms and ammunition that the brave Kurdish peshmerga forces have been requesting so that they can continue to take the fight to Daesh on the ground?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes, we are planning to provide the Kurdish regional government with more than £1 million worth of further ammunition to equip the peshmerga. We have already supplied ammunition and arms to start with and we have done a lot of training. We have trained some 3,000 of the peshmerga to fight, but we have a further shipment in hand and, subject to the approval of Parliament—there is a special procedure by which Parliament must signify its approval—I hope that that ammunition will be with the Kurdish peshmerga in the next few weeks.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for the quarterly update. I understand that there are some reports that the Russians have asked the Americans to join them in joint strikes. Have they also made such a request to the United Kingdom and, if so, does the Secretary of State share the concern of many people that such a move might undermine the political process because many in the Syrian Opposition see the Russians as the aggressors?

**Michael Fallon:** It is in Russia's gift to help push the political process on and to use its influence with the Assad regime much more constructively than it has done so far. Our own strike aircraft are covered by the existing memorandum between the United States and Russia, and so far are deconflicting the airspace around particular missions, but we are not otherwise co-operating.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** First, I welcome the quarterly report. We need to be in a cycle of delivering such reports with a focus on Daesh. Secondly, I thank the Secretary of State and the MOD for the very helpful briefing that was given yesterday in relation to Daesh. I asked two questions yesterday. One was about no-fly zones. The Secretary of State has been very clear in saying that there is no scope for no-fly zones at present. However, I hope he will keep that under review so that if at any point Assad and the Russians agree to it, we can implement that rapidly. The second question, which was not answered, was in relation to Raqqa and Mosul. If those two cities are turned into Stalingrad, what support can we give to civilians within them?

**Michael Fallon:** On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, we are adhering to the quarterly rhythm: the first statement was made in December, the next in February and it is now the end of May. It is useful for the House to be updated according to that timescale.

On no-fly zones, it is simply the practical application of a no-fly zone that I need persuading about; I am not clear at the moment how a no-fly zone could be properly policed. The worst thing of all would be to offer a no-fly zone that is not actually safe.

On the right hon. Gentleman's final point, Raqqa and Mosul are very large cities with, at the moment, large civilian populations who have not fled. That is why the operations are going to take a very long time. Ramadi took eight months. It is going to take a long time to persuade those civilians that Daesh is not their future and that it would be best for them to leave while the fighting is going on.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I pay tribute to the men and women of our armed services who are working day in, day out to liberate people from Daesh. What preparations are being made for post-conflict reconstruction when areas are liberated from Daesh, and what part is the United Kingdom playing in that?

**Michael Fallon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said and will make sure that it is passed back not just to the Royal Air Force, but to all those involved in this huge effort—our biggest single military undertaking at the moment. Stabilisation is the key: after liberating a town or city, it is essential to offer the local population the security and stability they need to be able to return. We are co-operating with our partners, and a huge amount of work is being done on the stabilisation effort, which will be offered to each city and town as it is liberated.

**Natalie McGarry** (Glasgow East) (Ind): Thank you for calling me so early, Mr Speaker, so that I can get out of the Chamber and spare everybody my germs.

I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Given that large areas of north-eastern Syria would not have been secured but for the Syrian Kurds, what practical support are we giving them and what efforts are being made to include them in diplomatic negotiations? Does he agree that it is incredibly problematic for a key actor in the Syrian Kurds to be excluded from Geneva I and II and from future peace talks, given their strategic importance as interlocutors in any future peace settlement?

**Michael Fallon:** The Kurds are represented in the Syrian talks. It is not the object of the talks to start excluding every single Kurdish group. The Syrian Kurds have to be part of the solution. Many of them have come forward in the fight against Daesh, as well as in the fight against the regime, and they have to be part of the future.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I also thank my right hon. Friend for his update, and add my thanks to the British military personnel who are serving in the region on our behalf. As the military campaign progresses, what assurance can he give that we are doing all we can to ensure that we also make progress on the political track?

**Michael Fallon:** Talks are under way on the future of Syria and they need to make more progress. My hon. Friend is right. In Iraq we have not seen the political progress needed to match the military progress, which is

getting ahead of the reforms, securitisation and stabilisation that we need to see following on, particularly in Anbar province. We urge the Abadi Government to crack on with the reforms needed to create a national guard in which people can have confidence, to give the governors the powers they need to get essential services up and running, and to ensure that the areas that are liberated are then properly policed.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State's statement did not refer to the Syrian Kurds—the Democratic Union party—or the Iraqi Kurds, the Kurdish Regional Government. In answer to an earlier question, he said that the long-delayed supply of ammunition to the peshmerga would take place at some point in the future. Why is it taking so long?

**Michael Fallon:** The peshmerga are able to access ammunition from a number of sources. They now have the funding to purchase it—some more funding has gone in from the United States recently—but we are not able to supply the Kurdish peshmerga directly. The Kurdish area is part of the unitary state of Iraq, so supplies have to be routed through Iraq and we also have to consider the needs of the Iraqi forces—the Iraqi army itself—vis-à-vis the peshmerga. I have, however, agreed a new shipment of ammunition, and I hope it will be going out there shortly.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the interesting update. It is clear from experience that when areas are liberated, a system of government, law and order and justice in which everyone can have confidence needs to be put in place quickly. Does he agree that while there may be some need for transitional arrangements, in the long term Assad cannot be the solution in Syria?

**Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. We have been very clear throughout that there is no future for Assad in the future Government of Syria and he needs to depart. We want to see in Syria what we have in Iraq—a Government who are genuinely representative of all groups in Syria and who are prepared to work towards a democratic and representative Administration.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State said: "It is outrageous that aid itself has become a weapon of war." Those outrages have grievous consequences for civilians and children. What preparations are the UK Government making to make sure that such crimes are investigated and that someone is held accountable for them at some point in the future?

**Michael Fallon:** I can give the hon. Lady that reassurance. That will be an important part of the work that will be needed when the conflict finally, I hope, ends. We are already working with non-governmental organisations to see what resources and funding they need in order to collect the evidence required to nail those responsible.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): On a recent visit to Moscow, it was often said that any lasting, peaceful and democratic solution in Syria would only happen in partnership with Russia. That view has also been expressed here at home, too. I have two questions. When did the Defence Secretary and the

[Douglas Chapman]

Foreign Secretary last meet their respective counterparts in the Russian Government? On timelines, will the Secretary of State give a commitment to the House that the lasting, peaceful and democratic solution will be delivered within the three-year target period that he suggested at yesterday's MOD briefing? Are we even close to that?

**Michael Fallon:** On the hon. Gentleman's first point, Russia has legitimate interests and influence in Syria, and we want it to bring that to bear constructively. The Foreign Secretary regularly meets his counterpart; I believe he met Mr Lavrov early last week. On the hon. Gentleman's third and final question, the original timescale was set not by me, but by Secretary Kerry. When we asked the House to support action in Iraq in summer 2014, Secretary Kerry's estimate was that it would take at least three years. We are not yet into the second year. This is, as I said in my statement, going to be a long campaign.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Turkey is a key NATO ally and a partner in our fight against Daesh. It has also taken in and provided a safe haven to millions of people fleeing the terror in Syria and Iraq. What support is the UK Government offering Turkey with regard to its own internal fight against Daesh, the terrorist attacks it has experienced and the other terrorist groups identified as operating there?

**Michael Fallon:** I visited Ankara for discussions just after one of the first attacks in Turkey. We have offered Turkey counter-terrorism assistance, and we should applaud the role it is playing in looking after so many refugees—more than 2 million of them—and the efforts it is making to close the border, stem the flow of foreign fighters and restrict Daesh's ability to trade in oil. Turkey deserves enormous credit for that. On the second part of the hon. Lady's question, I hope she will allow me to write to her.

**Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** In his statement, the Secretary of State mentioned that the number of foreign fighters has been reduced to 200. Has he made any assessment of the number of UK citizens—both male and female—who have travelled out to support Daesh and of how many have returned to the UK?

**Michael Fallon:** Again, I will try to get that specific information to the hon. Lady; I do not have it to hand. I want to make it clear that the estimate is of 200 foreign fighters joining Daesh a month, vis-à-vis the figure of 2,000 joining a month when Daesh was at its peak a couple of years ago. They have more than 200 foreign fighters, but the flow of new foreign fighters has been quite considerably reduced.

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** At the time of the Syria debate back in October, there were guarded suggestions that Russia, through the Vienna process, would work towards a stable transition in Syria within a six-month period. Clearly, that has not happened. Will the Secretary of State say whether there is any hope of Russia playing a constructive role?

**Michael Fallon:** Well, we are hoping for that, and it is depressing that it has not happened. Russia has huge influence in Syria and it could have played a much more constructive role, but we have seen what has happened since the so-called cessation of hostilities was agreed in February. We still see Russia playing a very malevolent role—claiming to have withdrawn some of its forces, but bringing in new helicopters and not directing its fire against Daesh. The hon. Gentleman asked what hope there is. I think we should always be hopeful. We will continue to engage with Russia and urge it to bring its influence to bear at the conference table.

**Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP):** What progress has been made in securing a safe corridor for civilians and in providing support for marginalised groups, such as the disabled?

**Michael Fallon:** It is extremely difficult to establish any kind of safe corridor in Syria, particularly in northern Syria where such groups are under most threat. If I may, I will look at that very specific point and write to the hon. Lady.

**Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab):** The point about civilian deaths is really important because the assurances we were given last year, when we were asked to extend precise, limited and targeted air strikes from Iraq to Syria, were central to persuading me to support the Government's proposals. I welcome—I really welcome—what the Secretary of State has said today, but what additional reassurance can he provide about the steps the RAF is taking to protect civilians in Syria and ensure that they do not become victims of the RAF's work?

**Michael Fallon:** We have set rules of engagement that apply to our operations in Syria as well as in Iraq. They are different from the rules of engagement of other countries; each country has its own rules of engagement. Any deliberate targets have to be approved, which covers the choice of munition involved, and an absolute assurance that civilians are not using, near using or likely to use the particular building or area to be bombed. As I said, that is checked over a period of days or perhaps weeks while the target is watched. Our commanders in the operations centre in the Gulf as well as the pilots themselves can, right until the last moment, pull back from a strike if they have any concern at all that civilians may be in the area. Obviously, in some of the areas of very intense fighting where there is close air support, it will be more and more difficult to ensure that we avoid civilian casualties. All I can say is that our policy is absolutely to avoid the risk of civilian casualties, and so far we believe that the RAF has been successful in doing that.

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** If the Government's predictions in the debate on 2 December had proved correct, Syria would have had a transitional Government next week, and free and fair elections by this time next year. What are the Secretary of State's most up-to-date predictions of when those two vital milestones will actually be delivered?

**Michael Fallon:** To be honest, I would not have predicted the progress that has been made in Iraq during the past few weeks and months. It has actually been more rapid



than I would have said had the hon. Gentleman asked me about that during the debate in December. In Syria, yes, progress has been far slower than we wanted and far slower than I thought would be the case when the cessation was agreed in Munich in February. However, this is war, and a lot of the people involved have an interest in sustaining this war, especially the Assad regime, supported by Russia, and we have to keep working at it.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He will be aware that Daesh's attacks on the city of Aleppo have been very brutal, very violent, very bloody and very destructive, and that many thousands of people have died or been injured. Some 225,000 Christians lived in Aleppo; now, there are only 25,000. There used to be 80,000 Armenian Christians in Aleppo; now there are only 10,000. What steps will the Government take to ensure that any support for opposition groups does not indirectly benefit extremists targeting minority communities, such as the Christians in Aleppo?

**Michael Fallon:** The hon. Gentleman is right: what is happening in Aleppo is nothing short of a tragedy. It is a beautiful and tolerant city—I have visited it myself in the past—which contains all kinds of groups from different faiths living and working happily alongside each other. It is important that all those groups are represented in the drive for a political settlement, and that is our aim.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I join other Members in condemning the attacks and raids on aid convoys. What support or protection can the UK provide for such convoys?

**Michael Fallon:** That is very difficult given the complexity of the situation in Syria, where multiple strikes are being carried out by the regime against its opponents and where we need to keep up the pressure on the infrastructure that supports Daesh. However, these attacks could stop: it is within the gift of the regime to stop them. It is within the gift of the Russians to bring their influence to bear, and I still hope that they will do so.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Defence Secretary talked about people returning to a safe environment, which we all support. What more can be done by the international community to secure the freedom of the Yazidi women who were captured and taken into slavery?

**Michael Fallon:** We have had some success in populations returning, particularly in Tikrit, to which the vast majority of the population has now returned. That is more difficult in Ramadi, simply because so many improvised explosive devices have been seeded right across the city. There are different circumstances in each of the particular areas. In relation to the Yazidi women, about whom the

hon. Gentleman is concerned, we are working with NGOs to see what we can do to identify where they are being held and what more can be done to help them to return to Sinjar.

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): To return to what the Secretary of State said in his statement about the number of foreign fighters joining Daesh being reduced to 200 a month from up to 2,000 a month, that is extremely welcome. It would build on that if we could work with our international partners to drive that down to zero and completely isolate this organisation.

**Michael Fallon:** I hope that we can do so. We are working very closely with our partners—over 40 countries are now reporting, through Interpol and other international organisations, on foreign fighters—so that we can share information about these fighters as they travel towards Iraq or Syria. Of course, we must play our part by ensuring that more people are not radicalised in this country and by keeping tabs on those who are likely to go out there.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give the House an assurance that the RAF will not take part in air strikes against Daesh in Libya without a further vote in this House?

**Michael Fallon:** Yes. We have made it clear that we are not planning any kind of combat role either for our troops or for the RAF in Libya. That is not part of our planning. If we were considering further military action against Daesh wherever they are—whether in Libya or anywhere else—we would of course come to this House to discuss it first.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): A recent report, “Why Young Syrians Choose to Fight”, argues that money acts as a key recruiter for Daesh, claiming that while the Syrian army pays around \$100 a month, often late, Daesh can pay three times that amount on time. What alternative economic options for young Syrians are therefore being used to undermine Daesh's recruitment?

**Michael Fallon:** The first thing is to undermine Daesh's own access to revenue and finance. There is some evidence that we are beginning to do that and to reduce its earnings from oil and other trades. There is also some evidence—anecdotal, perhaps, but an accumulating body of evidence—that its pay rates to fighters are being reduced. Beyond that, we have to get the Syrian economy going again. The sooner we get a political settlement, the sooner we can get in the money that we and a lot of other countries pledged during the London conference. The money is ready and waiting to rebuild the Syrian economy and, most importantly, to give the young people of Syria a reason to stay in Syria and build a new society that is safe and secure for their future.

## Debate on the Address

[4TH DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, 18 May).*

*Question again proposed.*

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

### Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad

2.1 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** I am delighted to open this debate, and congratulate the Opposition on selecting this subject. The security of Britain and the British people, our relations with Europe and the promotion of Britain's values, including human rights, around the world are at the heart of our foreign policy. One year into this Parliament, the challenges we face to our security, prosperity and values have not diminished—if anything, they are growing.

The threat posed by Daesh and its affiliates continues and has now manifested itself in attacks in European cities. The wider instability in the middle east persists, and the Israel-Palestine question is no nearer to a solution. North Korea has demonstrated its determination to flout international law by developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them. Russia demonstrates the same determination through its continued destabilisation of Ukraine and its illegal occupation of Crimea. Tensions are rising in the South China sea. The migration crisis in the eastern and central Mediterranean is presenting new challenges to our near neighbours in Europe. As we approach the referendum in just over four weeks' time, even the theoretical possibility that Britain might vote to leave the European Union is having a chilling effect on economic growth, and on business and consumer confidence. Wherever we look, our world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain.

Against that hazardous global backdrop, some have argued for retrenchment and withdrawal from a global role as the safest option. But we cannot turn our backs. As a trading nation, with one of the largest and most open economies in the world, our security and prosperity depend upon global stability and order. Some 5 million British nationals live overseas, and millions more travel every year. Our trade depends on the sea lanes and airways that are the arteries of global commerce. International engagement and influence are therefore fundamental to maintaining Britain's security and prosperity.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): My right hon. Friend paints a picture of those of us who want to leave the European Union as wanting to retrench. That could not be further from the truth, and I suggest that "Project Fear" is once again going down a very negative path. In leaving, we would have greater freedom

to trade and form trade deals with the rest of the world. At the moment we are barred from doing that; as a member of the EU, we cannot form individual international trading agreements.

**Mr Hammond:** Never mind "Project Fear", what about project paranoia? I was not in any way referring to the exit campaigners, but simply observing that some people have suggested retrenchment. As my hon. Friend has taken me in that direction, I will answer his question. We enjoy free trade with 53 nations by virtue of free trade agreements negotiated by the European Union. Those campaigning for exit tell me that if we were to leave the EU we would rapidly negotiate new free trade agreements, with the EU itself and then with the 53 countries with which that Union has free trade agreements. Our experience in the real world is that these agreements take a lot of time to negotiate—the EU-Canada free trade agreement has been seven years in the negotiating and is still not ratified.

Another small problem that my hon. Friend should think about is that we do not actually have any trade negotiators. We would be seeking to negotiate those 53 plus one trade agreements from scratch, because for the past 40 years, for better or worse, the European Union has negotiated all our trade agreements on our behalf. We do not have civil servants experienced in this field of activity.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Foreign Secretary made any assessment of how many additional members of staff would be needed by either his Department or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to deal with this problem, or of how many years it would take to train them?

**Mr Hammond:** The latter point is more important than the former, if I may say so. It is not simply a question of nipping out and calling up the jobcentre to say, "Could you send us some experienced trade negotiators to hire?" We would literally be starting from scratch. I look across the Atlantic to the world's largest economy and its trade negotiation team, under Michael Froman; that is an extremely good team, but it is very small and has struggled to carry out two trade negotiations in parallel. I am afraid that the idea that in a matter of months, or even years, we would have negotiated a massive deal with the European Union and 53 separate trade agreements with other countries around the world—before starting on the ambitious expansion programme referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)—is, to quote the Prime Minister, "for the birds".

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Is the situation not actually worse than the Foreign Secretary has set out? Many of those countries have signed trade deals with the EU in order to access the single market. Was he as dismayed as I was to hear major proponents of Vote Leave call for us not to rejoin the single market should we leave?

**Mr Hammond:** I was indeed astonished to hear leading exit campaigners suggest that we do not want to be part of the single market. Until relatively recently, their position was that we could have it all—be outside but somehow get free and privileged access to the single

market. That was never likely to be possible, but it was at least an ambition. Now we are told that we do not want to be part of the single market. I can read that only as a manifesto for the impoverishment of the British people. We know from the Treasury's own model that we would be looking at a reduction in our standard of living of £4,300 per annum per household by the end of the next decade. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, sometimes we have to deal with recessions and economic pressure from outside, but we should not have to deal with a made-at-home, DIY recession that is entirely self-inflicted. We should avoid that at all costs.

In the spending review and the strategic defence and security review published at the end of last year, we took clear decisions to invest in our security and safeguard our prosperity, to maintain our world class armed forces, to grow our unique security and intelligence agencies—and, through the Investigatory Powers Bill, give them the powers they need to track down terrorists and others who seek to do us harm—and to protect our global diplomatic network by maintaining the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in real terms. All that is underpinned by our decision to meet the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence, and the UN target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on overseas aid, making Britain the only major country in the world that meets both those commitments.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** My right hon. Friend mentions diplomatic posts overseas. Will he remind the House how many new diplomatic posts have been opened under this Government and their coalition predecessor in places where we did not previously have diplomatic representation?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend tests me on the exact number. I think that a dozen or more new posts have been opened, but I will write to him with the exact figure. The important point is that we have opened new posts in secondary cities in China—when we talk about secondary cities in China, we mean those with populations of between 5 million and 10 million—and India, as well as reopening posts in countries in Latin America from which we had withdrawn.

**Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con):** The Secretary of State mentioned our commitment to 2% of GDP on defence spending. Will he confirm that had we not transferred £820 million from the pensions budget in another Department, and funds from other Departments, Britain would have fallen below that 2% figure? By that sleight of hand, we have committed to the 2%, but we have not added a single penny to the defence budget, when, as my right hon. Friend said, we face a very dangerous world.

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend and I were Defence Ministers in a past life, and there is no sleight of hand. The 2% NATO target is based on NATO definitions, according to which Britain will spend 2% of its GDP on defence. As I am sure he has already found from talking to people in the defence community, the important thing is not the amount spent today, but the long-term commitment to maintain defence spending at 2% of our GDP so that our defence spending rises in line with our prosperity as a nation. That is the right thing for us to do.

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) rose—**

**Mr Hammond:** I will be tempted by my right hon. Friend and take one more intervention.

**Dr Lewis:** My right hon. Friend is right. No NATO rules have been broken—we can argue about whether there was any new money, or whether it was money that we could have counted in the past but did not. Surely the important point is that the 2% is not a target for us: it is a minimum. The last time we faced threats of the sort we face now was in the 1980s, when we spent between 4% and 5% of GDP on defence. We are not talking about ringing church bells over 2%; we need to raise our sights to a higher figure altogether.

**Mr Hammond:** My right hon. Friend is right to say that 2% is a minimum commitment. The reassurance that that level of spend gives to our armed forces and the military, and the fact that it is linked to our rising GDP, is important. Equally, this is not just about the amount of money spent, although that it is important; it is about how we spend it to ensure the maximum defence effect.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) rose—**

**Mr Hammond:** I will come to the hon. Lady in just a moment.

The first duty of any British Government is to keep our homeland and people safe and secure. Today, threats to that security take two principal forms: the immediate risk of terrorism that is associated with violent extremist Islamism, and Daesh in particular; and the longer term threat from a breakdown of the rules-based international system that has underpinned our safety and prosperity since the end of the cold war.

We are engaged in what the Prime Minister has described as a “generational struggle” against Islamist extremism. It is struggle not against a particular country or organisation but against a poisonous ideology that seeks to corrupt one of the world's great religions. Terrorist attacks in the last year in Paris, Brussels, the skies over Egypt, on the beaches of Sousse, in Baghdad, Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Nigeria and many other places have demonstrated that the threat from Islamist extremism is global. That threat seeks to undermine our values, democracy and freedom, and it is targeting British citizens and those of our allies.

In spite of the tragic loss of life, we should not overlook the progress we have made in pushing Daesh back in Iraq and Syria, and in undermining its core narrative of the caliphate. The Defence Secretary set out in his statement to the House the leading role that the UK is playing, and the military success that we are achieving in Iraq and Syria. As the tide turns against Daesh, we are turning its own weapons against it and harnessing the power of the internet to expose its lies, challenge its ideology and undermine its claim to be a viable state.

On the humanitarian front, Britain continues to be at the forefront of the international response. We have committed more than £2.3 billion, and at the London conference in February we raised more than \$12 billion—the largest amount ever raised in a single day for a humanitarian

[*Mr Philip Hammond*]

crisis. At the International Syria Support Group meeting in Vienna last Tuesday, a British proposal to begin UN airdrops to besieged communities in Syria if Assad blocks access was agreed by all parties, including the Russians and Iranians.

Through its leading role in the ISSG, Britain is also at the forefront of the international effort to end the Syrian civil war—a precondition to defeating Daesh and dealing with the migration crisis in Europe. We are clear that we need an inclusive political solution to that conflict, and to get that we need all ISSG members to use their influence to deliver the transitional Government to which they have all signed up—a Government who can provide stability, represent all Syrians, and with whom the international community can work to defeat Daesh.

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that for the threat of the 1 June deadline to be credible, World Food Programme planes need to be protected by member states, or we will need to do the airdrops ourselves? Have the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence begun operational planning to enable those airdrops to proceed?

**Mr Hammond:** The plan is for the airdrops to be made by the World Food Programme using contracted civilian aircraft. The World Food Programme is already making food airdrops into Deir ez-Zor, the isolated city in the east of Syria, and it has done so successfully without loss to those aircraft. Clearly there are operational aspects that members of the ISSG—particularly the Americans and Russians—are now working through, and we will seek undertakings from the regime. We also know that the Russians have, let us say, significant influence over the operation of the regime's air defence system, and we expect all members of the ISSG to do everything in their power to ensure that those airdrops are successful and carried out without undue risk to the aircrew.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Idomeni camp has just been closed, and he referred to the refugee crisis. Is he aware of where those refugees will be placed as an alternative, and are UK officials on the ground to assist with that?

**Mr Hammond:** I cannot answer the right hon. Gentleman's question, but I can tell him that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is heavily engaged in that action and is trying to ensure that those affected are properly cared for and relocated in accommodation that is at least as secure and adequate as their current accommodation.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rightly said many times from the Dispatch Box that President Putin is one of the few people in the world who can do a lot in this situation. With the attacks yesterday on some of the Assad stronghold areas that have not been touched before, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of Russia's involvement

moving forward and whether we are looking at a new dimension? That area is quite close to some Russian bases.

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is right, and the Russians will be making a constant calculation about how they can extract maximum leverage from their involvement in Syria while minimising their exposure. I suspect that some in the Russian high command and the Kremlin will have been deeply uncomfortable about the fact that yesterday those Daesh attacks were launched in areas that were previously thought to be under rock-solid regime control and close to Russian military facilities. That changes the calculus, but I hope it will add weight to our argument with the Russians that we need to work together to get a successful transition in Syria to a Government who are supported by all Syrians. We must then work together with that Government to defeat the evil that is Daesh.

Progress in our objective of defeating Daesh will only be possible if the barrel bombings end, if the cessation of hostilities is respected, if humanitarian access to besieged communities is granted and if all sides are prepared to negotiate seriously to achieve political transition.

So much for Syria. In Iraq, we will continue to support the efforts of Prime Minister Abadi to steer his country through the dangers it currently faces, and to deliver the political and economic reform the Iraqi people desperately need: national reconciliation, security, stabilisation of areas liberated from Daesh, and the provision of jobs and basic services.

We have always said that winning the fight against Daesh would take time, but we have no doubt of our ultimate success in Iraq, Syria and Libya. However, winning the hearts and minds of tens of millions of young, potentially vulnerable Muslims who see extremism as a credible response to the lack of opportunity many of them face will be a longer-term challenge for us.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Of course, I think everyone agrees that one has to defeat violent and non-violent extremism. On the extremism Bill in the Queen's Speech, will the Foreign Secretary clarify how it will define when an individual has crossed the threshold of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, so that communities and enforcement agencies know when to take action? Will there be full consultation with all faith communities?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend hits on a crucial point. The boundary line between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour is fine and fraught with dangers. It is a minefield. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to put forward some of the Government's thoughts on this and consult extensively before legislation is introduced. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with much of what the Foreign Secretary says about the complexity of the situation in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Clearly, when there is a complex set of humanitarian, terrorist and other circumstances, we have to act in concert across all areas of our international operation. Let me turn briefly to Yemen, which has been discussed in the House today.

The situation in Yemen is also extremely complex, with huge humanitarian needs and different participants. Whether we like it or not, we are involved in a humanitarian, military and diplomatic capacity, either directly or through our relationship with Saudi Arabia. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is absolutely crucial that we act in concert across all areas of international policy? Will he therefore agree to an independent assessment of the very serious allegations made about the use of cluster munitions and other attacks on civilians, which might undermine our place in that region and that conflict?

**Mr Hammond:** I agree with a lot of what the hon. Gentleman says. The specific allegation is that British-made cluster munitions, which will have been made and delivered probably 30 years ago, may have been used. We do not believe that that is the case, but the Ministry of Defence—he will have heard a Defence Minister say this from the Dispatch Box today—is carrying out an urgent investigation. It will look at the evidence and then decide how to move forward. We have a high level of confidence that British-made cluster munitions have not been used in this conflict, but we must of course look at the allegation that has been made, and any evidence presented in support of it, and respond appropriately.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** My right hon. Friend mentions Libya. With hindsight, it is clear that after the fall of Gaddafi we did not really give enough support to the Government we then recognised. The place collapsed into anarchy and is a possible base for ISIS. About half an hour ago, the Secretary of State for Defence said we were offering security assistance to the Government we now recognise, if and when they request it. Will the Foreign Secretary tell me whether his Department and other Departments are giving every other possible diplomatic and political support to that Government? Until they can establish themselves as a real Administration capable of delivering services to their public and of winning public support, we run the danger again of having a slightly fictional Government in Tripoli, while the rest of the country falls prey to anarchy or even ISIS.

**Mr Hammond:** As I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend would readily agree, hindsight is indeed a wonderful thing. [*Interruption.*] The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), reminds me that elections were held in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi. It is since then that things have gone wrong.

On support to Prime Minister Sarraj and the Government of national accord, yes, we are providing technical, diplomatic and political assistance. My right hon. and learned Friend will recall that I visited Tripoli a few weeks ago. We are working very closely with Prime Minister Sarraj, both bilaterally and through the European Union. Prime Minister Sarraj was at the meeting in Vienna last Monday in which 20-odd countries got together to discuss how we can best support what that Government are doing.

The situation in Libya is complex, but I think Prime Minister Sarraj is approaching it in the right way—a bottom-up approach. He is not trying to create a

Government who can rule Libya in some monolithic fashion, because that is not practical. He is trying to create an umbrella Government within which municipalities are empowered to deliver the services and run the structures that people need. We have considerable experience of that approach—including, indeed, in Syria—working with devolved levels of government in small areas to try to establish good governance from the bottom up. I suspect that that will be a more realistic approach than a top-down approach.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** On Libya, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm whether he has had any consultations with the neighbouring country of Algeria? It has great experience of dealing with terrorism and has had huge problems as a result of the instability in Libya. It can be a huge asset and support in stabilising its neighbouring country. Are those consultations taking place?

**Mr Hammond:** Yes, I can confirm that to the hon. Lady. I visited Algeria and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East has visited Algeria. The Algerians are playing a role. That in itself is significant, because for many, many years Algeria took a rather isolationist, non-interventionist approach. As a neighbouring country, it is at risk from what is going on in Libya. It has recognised that and is engaging with the challenge. We are extremely grateful for the support that Algeria—with, as the hon. Lady says, its considerable experience of dealing with a major scale insurgency—is able to deliver.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Hammond:** I am just going to make a little progress, if my hon. Friend will allow me, as he has had one bite of the cherry already.

While we step up the fight against Daesh and Islamist extremism, the old challenge of state-based aggression has not gone away. To our east, Russia's disregard for international norms, its illegal annexation of Crimea and its continuing destabilisation of eastern Ukraine are echoes of an era that, frankly, most of us thought had passed with the fall of the Berlin wall. They represent a clear threat to the stability of the post-cold war European security order, and, more widely, to the rules-based international system on which an open, free-trading liberal democracy such as ours depends.

As well as violating the sovereign territory of another country and undermining the rules-based system, Russia's actions in Ukraine have led to the loss of more than 9,000 lives and the displacement of up to 1 million people from their homes. Responsibility for this human misery lies squarely at the door of the Kremlin. It is a direct result of a deliberate policy that seeks to deny the right of independent former Soviet republics to determine their own economic and political destiny. This Government remain clear that Russia must be held to account for its actions. We will work through the EU to keep up the economic pressure with hard-hitting and carefully calibrated sanctions. Those sanctions must remain in place until such time as Russia delivers on the pledges it made at Minsk. In the meantime, we will continue to provide non-lethal support and training to the Ukrainian armed

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forces. Building on the British military units already rotating through Poland and the Baltic states, we will announce at the NATO summit in Warsaw in June further measures to reassure our eastern allies in the face of this continuing aggression.

At the same time, we will engage with Russia where it is clearly in our national interests to do so. Russia, along with Iran, is one of the two countries that have real influence on the Syrian regime.

As members of the ISSG, they have the principal responsibility for telling Assad that it is time to go. We will continue to work with Russia on Syria and at the UN and to collaborate with it on counter-terrorism, where British lives are potentially at risk, but it will not be business as usual. All nations must know that we cannot and will not look the other way while the rules-based system is repeatedly violated. We look forward to the time when Russia rejoins the community of nations as a partner in upholding international rules, but our eyes are wide open and we know that it might be a long time coming.

As we said in the 2010 strategic defence and security review and again in 2015, Britain's national security is indivisible from its economic security. We cannot keep people safe if we do not have a strong economy, and vice versa. As we have continued to deal with the economic legacy we inherited—bringing down the deficit and restoring sustainable growth to our economy—we have also been strengthening our diplomatic muscle in emerging economies in order to grow our trade and support jobs here at home. And those efforts are paying off. The state visit by China's President Xi last year generated £40 billion of commercial deals, helping to create more than 5,000 permanent jobs in this country and more than 20,000 construction-phase jobs. During Prime Minister Modi's visit in November, UK and Indian businesses agreed deals worth £9 billion. Inward investment from India in 2014-15 created more than 7,000 jobs and safeguarded more than 1,500 others. Since the UK's free trade deal with the Republic of Korea in 2011, the value of UK exports to Korea has more than doubled.

While we seek to grow our links with the world's emerging economies, however, our trade and investment relationship with the EU will always be central to our economic success story. As the House knows, the Government's clear view is that Britain's continuing prosperity is best served by our remaining a leading member of a reformed EU. Our membership puts us, the No. 2 economic power in the EU, inside the world's largest single market, with a seat at the decision-making table. It is a market with 500 million consumers and a quarter of the world's GDP and a market that buys 44% of Britain's exports.

There is a world of difference between being inside such a market, with tariff-free access as of right, and being outside it, scrabbling around for a deal; between making the rules of the market to protect our interests and being governed by rules designed for the benefit and advantage of others. Our membership safeguards the pound and the Bank of England, and with the deal that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated

in February, our membership keeps us out of Schengen, exempts us from ever-closer union and limits EU migrants' access to our welfare system. It is the best of both worlds.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** The Foreign Secretary and I are good friends but we disagree on this matter. Will he confirm that under this much-vaunted reform deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated, which does not add up to a row of beans, if the UK were to introduce financial measures that we believed to be in the interests of the City of London but which the eurozone deemed to conflict with theirs, we would be obliged either to change our measures or to go to the European Court of Justice for arbitration—and we know that the Court always finds in favour of the *acquis communautaire*?

**Mr Hammond:** We do not know by any means that the ECJ always finds in favour of the Community. Indeed, we have done rather well when challenged in the ECJ. For example, when the European Central Bank disgracefully tried to prevent euro-denominated financial instruments from being cleared in the City of London, we went to the ECJ and won the case, with a clear declaration that the ECB's proposal was illegal. So I simply do not accept the premise of my Friend's question.

**Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con):** Further to that point, is not the very essence of the Prime Minister's deal in Brussels, to which I suggest too little attention has been paid, that it provides a firm guarantee that the UK's position outside the eurozone will not be used to jeopardise its position within the single market? Is that not a very important safeguard and one that, in the context of the ECJ and any arbitration it has to carry out, will have to be taken into account and has binding force in international law?

**Mr Hammond:** My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. Those on the other side of the argument spent a lot of time trying to argue that the agreement did not have binding force in international law, only—eventually—to have to concede that it did. He is absolutely right. The deal that the Prime Minister negotiated is substantive, and if we vote to remain in the EU on 23 June, we will move ahead with the implementation of those measures, which will give Britain not only the advantages, which we already have, that come with membership of a 500-million consumer-strong marketplace but all the additional advantages and assurances that the deal brings.

I know from my meetings with colleagues from across the EU that, whatever people in the House or the country think, our colleagues in Europe cannot believe the deal that we have negotiated. They cannot believe we managed to negotiate the best of both worlds—being in the EU but able to opt out of all the measures we find do not suit our political purposes.

**Stephen Doughty:** The Foreign Secretary talked about the benefits for our exporters, and that includes the steel industry, which has a huge presence in my constituency and across south Wales. Tomorrow, thousands of steelworkers will march through London, to Parliament, to raise their concerns about what the Government will do to support the steel industry. Does he agree that the

very worst thing we can do for the steel industry is to pull out and lose the possibility of our steel industry exporting tariff-free to the rest of Europe?

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but it goes further than that. Let us be honest: the steel industry worldwide is facing a crisis. We cannot wish it away, create more demand or just make the excess capacity disappear, but we are always better and more effective at addressing these problems if we do so collectively, and working across the EU is the best way to tackle this very difficult problem.

Britain, in particular, will reap further and disproportionate benefits—some of my colleagues in Europe would say quite unfair benefits—as the EU develops the single markets in services, digital, energy and capital, because all these relatively immature EU single markets are areas in which the UK is the leading economy in Europe. The commitments we have obtained to moving forward rapidly with the further development of those single markets will disproportionately benefit this country and disproportionately create jobs and growth in the UK after our decision on 23 June.

We can only reap those benefits, however, with a renewed democratic mandate from the British people. For four decades, they have been denied their say—and frankly, but for the election of a Conservative Government, they would not be getting a say now. So I welcome the debate and the focus it has brought. It has forced all of us to think hard about the issues and the consequences, now that there is a real decision to be made. I hope that the House can agree on two things—that on 23 June the British people must have their say and that we politicians must respect their decision, whatever it is.

We cannot separate our security and prosperity from the values system in which they are grounded. Countless examples around the world have demonstrated through history that where political competition, the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and tolerance of difference are lacking, social, political and economic stability will be vulnerable at best and absent at worst. Conversely, where societies respond to the demand for greater rule of law, respect for human rights and individual freedoms, innovation and entrepreneurialism flourish—the so-called golden thread of mutually reinforcing values.

Of course, we cannot expect in the 21st century to be able simply to impose a one-size-fits-all system across the world. Those days are well and truly over. As our own example has shown, ideas of freedom, democracy and the rule of law need time to take root, and the form they take will depend on where a nation is on its development pathway and on its individual culture and traditions. We can, however, seek to nurture, to encourage and to support countries as they move towards respect for these essential values.

It is the direction of travel that matters. My view is clear: where a nation's political, social, economic and judicial development is taking it in the right direction towards better governance, stronger rule of law and respect for human rights, we should work with it and support it. Where it is taking it away from those goals, we will call it out, as we have done recently in South Sudan and Burundi.

Most importantly, where countries fall short, we are committed to a pragmatic response that seeks to make a difference rather than disengagement, posturing and

empty rhetoric. We have doubled FCO funding for human rights projects to £10 million, putting our money where our mouth is, but more important than that, by mainstreaming our human rights work, we have hard-wired it into everything we do. We have made it an integral part of day-to-day diplomacy—not a bolt-on optional extra. I firmly believe that our approach is yielding real, practical dividends.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Foreign Secretary therefore take the opportunity to disavow the comment made by his permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Simon McDonald, who said that human rights were

“no longer a priority for the UK government”?

**Mr Hammond:** Sir Simon has explained that what he was trying to convey was that we are mainstreaming, so we do not have a separate category any longer. We have mainstreamed human rights into our consular, political and mainstream diplomatic work. By doing so, we embed that in a way that is delivering results throughout our agenda.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it is a bit rich for British diplomats and politicians to travel the globe lecturing others about human rights when we are about to repeal our own Human Rights Act and some members of the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman is a part wish to withdraw from the European convention on human rights?

**Mr Hammond:** No, I do not. Throughout the world, Britain is recognised as an important champion of human rights and a country in which many of the rights taken for granted today across the world originated. I hope we can have a constructive debate about these issues.

Before I conclude, I want to confront head on the notion, which have heard, that the Government are putting economic and trade interests before human rights. Yes, we are serious about increasing our global trade to secure more jobs and greater economic security for the British people, but that does not come at the expense of our values. The deeper and broader our relationships with other countries become, the greater our influence and the easier it is to have frank conversations about issues on which we disagree. Building economic and political relationships helps to build influence and leverage. It is not always visible—progress often takes place behind the scenes—but we should be ruthlessly focused on what works. On the occasions where private influence fails, we can and do speak out publicly. Ultimately, I believe the best way to achieve the positive changes we all want to see on human rights is to engage constructively as part of a comprehensive relationship.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Is the Foreign Secretary seriously telling us that right now our relationship with Saudi Arabia is a case of not putting human rights secondary to economic interest?

**Mr Hammond:** I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is around in five, 10 or 15 years' time, so that we can look back from that vantage point on what is happening

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now. Something very significant is happening in Saudi Arabia. The “Vision 2030” plan that has been published by the deputy Crown Prince sets out a trajectory for Saudi Arabia’s development, which is inevitably going to change that country. It is not just an economic plan; it is far more than that. If we want to influence the direction of Saudi Arabia’s development, I strongly advise engaging with that project and helping to shape it rather than turning our backs on that country, as many have suggested we should.

**Jo Cox:** We now have decades and decades of experience showing that early intervention to prevent human rights abuses and mass atrocities works. Does the Foreign Secretary feel that his Department, and indeed the whole of government, would benefit from a mass atrocity prevention lens being focused on all policies so that we intervene early and fast to prevent escalation?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Syria.

**Mr Hammond:** What the hon. Lady says is persuasive, but I am trying to think how to operationalise it in a way that is different from what we are already doing. As my hon. Friend reminds me, that is what we thought we were doing in Syria, but unfortunately we have not succeeded in preventing the atrocities that are still going on there. Let me consider further what the hon. Lady has said and perhaps write to her about it.

Under this Government, the UK is making a decisive contribution to the global agenda. We are leading reform in the European Union and, if the British people give their consent, we will continue to drive that reform in the future. We are standing up to Russian aggression, defending the rules-based international system that Russia seeks to undermine and providing military reassurance to our eastern allies who feel so threatened by Russia’s actions.

We are supporting human rights around the world, making it a core part of every diplomat’s work, strengthening the values-based, rule-of-law system upon which our prosperity, our security and our freedoms depend. In an ever-more complex and dangerous world, our diplomats, our military, our intelligence and security services, our police, our border force and many others work tirelessly, day in, day out, to keep us safe. Their achievements often go unsung; the risks they take often go unnoticed, so I want to end by thanking them, on behalf of the whole House and the British people, for the work they do and the remarkable results they deliver.

2.47 pm

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): I begin where the Foreign Secretary ended, and join him in expressing the thanks of the Opposition to our diplomats for the extraordinary service they give to our country and the work they do around the globe. We are all very proud of them.

It is probably true to say that for every single Member in this Chamber today, this Gracious Speech debate has a significance in one respect that is unmatched by any of its predecessors. That is because it takes place on the eve of the referendum decision that our nation will take on

23 June. It is a decision, yes, about our membership of the European Union, but also a decision about something much more fundamental even than that. We will be deciding what kind of country we are and wish to be in a world that is changing, as the Foreign Secretary clearly set out in his speech, and will continue to change as this generation gives way to the next.

Ours is a remarkable country. We are less than 1% of the world’s population, yet its fifth-strongest economy. Our language is spoken by one in five people across the globe—granted, with varying degrees of fluency. We are among the world’s leaders in science, the arts, literature and Nobel prizes. For a small island nation off the coast of Europe, we have great influence around the globe. Every one of these is a reason why the decision we make will be watched closely by friends and others alike—not least because our future as a nation is now more intertwined with the lives and fates of others than it has ever been before.

Technological advance is expanding our knowledge of the world and shrinking the time it takes to discover more about it. An event can be seen almost instantaneously on a mobile phone on the other side of the world. Global flows of goods and services, information, finance, ideas and people are expanding. This world offers us great opportunity, but presents us with challenges too. It demands that we look beyond these shores if we are to ensure that Britain continues to be safe and successful. The national interest in this era is best served by an international approach. That means playing a full part in global institutions and not walking away from them, and it means defending human rights and our values both at home and abroad. I think it is fair to say that as some politics moves to the extremes, a struggle is taking place in Europe for the soul of the continent, and in that context I congratulate Alexander Van der Bellen on his election victory as the new President of Austria. We saw how close that result was.

With regard to the referendum, there has been much debate about the facts. “Give us the facts,” the people demand.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): May I draw attention to one of the facts that may well emerge from the referendum? If the European Union achieves more than 55% support in Scotland, will that not show that the European Union is more popular among Scots than the British Union, the United Kingdom?

**Hilary Benn:** I look forward to the contribution of voters in Scotland to ensuring that we remain in the European Union. I think it would be nice to see a more vigorous campaign from the SNP in support of a remain vote, but that is in the hands of those who sit on the SNP Benches.

The first of the facts is the fact of our membership of the European Union, and what it has brought. It has brought jobs, growth and investment. It has brought rights for workers and consumers that are guaranteed from John O’Groats to the tip of the Peloponnese, and from Lisbon to Riga. It has brought paid holidays, improved maternity and paternity leave, limits on working times, and a fairer deal for agency and temporary workers: all those are protected by the EU. It has brought environmental protection and progress, from



cleaner air to cleaner beaches, and from better safeguarding of our most precious habitats to tackling dangerous climate change. Europe has acted together to make a difference. As the Foreign Secretary said, we have access to the largest single market in the world, to which we sell 44% of our exports, and indeed, through our membership, we have trade deals with 53 other countries' markets. That shows how Europe's collective negotiating strength achieves stronger trade with the rest of the world than we could hope to achieve alone.

When it comes to domestic security, whether we face the threat of terrorism or organised crime, we are made safer by working with our allies, sharing information and bringing criminals to justice through the European arrest warrant. In relation to national security and dealing with climate change, Europe has shown great leadership. The Iran nuclear deal was led by the European Union. As for standing up to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the sanctions to which the Foreign Secretary referred are clearly biting on the Russian economy. I am sure that the whole House will support what he said earlier about the renewal of those sanctions in July, until such time as the Minsk agreement is fully observed by Russia.

As well as thanking our diplomats, we should thank the police, the security services and our armed forces for their commitment and for the sacrifices that they have made in order to keep us safe. It is important that, in the legislation promised in the Gracious Speech, we update the law on investigatory powers to enable them to go on doing that effectively; but Labour will hold the Government to account to ensure that, by means of strong safeguards, the right balance is struck between security and privacy.

All this shows that the European Union gives us influence in the world, and a louder voice. It is the very opposite of the picture painted by the leave campaign of "poor old Britain", put upon and unable to cope. For those who remember the ad, "The Seven Stone Weakling" is having sand kicked in its face by the other member states. What nonsense! What a lack of faith in our abilities as a nation! The truth is that we are a strong and influential member state. That is certainly how other EU member states see us, and it is time that the leave campaign stopped trying to sell us short.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con) *rose*—

**Hilary Benn:** I will give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee.

**Crispin Blunt:** I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was making an excellent case in the first part of his speech, but he is now entering a different territory in which he is putting up Aunt Sallies to be attacked. Two internationalisms are competing here, one that takes a global view of the world, and one that is within the European Union. Those are both perfectly respectable views, and they are based on internationalism. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will continue to make a positive case for his side of the argument, rather than putting up Aunt Sallies which are not actually true.

**Hilary Benn:** I hope the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that I am making a positive case. However, I can see that the charge that I just levelled at the leave campaigners has wounded precisely because that is

what they argue: that somehow Britain cannot cope with being in the European Union—that we cannot manage the place that we have in the institution.

I also say to the hon. Gentleman that it is a fallacy to suggest that somehow, in this referendum, we are faced with a choice between the one and the other. We hear that in the debate about trade. People say that we should be trading with other parts of the world, but our trade with China has doubled since 2010. Have we been prevented from increasing our trade with China because we are part of the European Union? Of course we have not. We can do both. Indeed, Britain's tradition suggests that not only are we capable of doing both, but we will benefit from doing both.

**Mr Baron:** I cannot help observing that, actually, Aunt Sallies are being created here. The leave camp is not suggesting that we are being kicked around; that is a negative view that the right hon. Gentleman puts to the leave camp. What we are suggesting is that there is a much brighter future outside the EU. There is a fundamental difference.

Of course we can stand up for ourselves: we are the fifth largest economy in the world. We have the world's most prominent language, and so forth. But the fact that we have a brighter future outside is illustrated by the fact that we are currently forbidden to negotiate trade deals with countries unless they are routed through the EU. If we were to come out of the EU, we could do that, and it would lead to greater prosperity.

**Hilary Benn:** Let me say first that damaging our economy and people's job prospects is not my idea of a brighter future, and secondly that I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not follow him down the Canadian road. We know that it has taken Canada seven years so far to negotiate its own trade deal with the European Union.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** As a fellow Leeds MP—along with the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who is also sitting on the Labour Front Bench—I recognise, as we all do, how important a role the University of Leeds plays in our city in terms of employment and investment. Members of the leave campaign are going around with posters which say that all the money we contribute to the EU will go into the NHS. That is their policy, whatever the rights and wrongs of it may be. Does it not concern the right hon. Gentleman that, in that event, there simply will not be the investment in our higher education research that currently comes from Europe, and that, therefore, either those people do not care or it is a lie?

**Hilary Benn:** The hon. Gentleman has identified one of many inconsistencies in the arguments advanced by the leave campaign. It is noticeable that every single university in the country has spoken out about the importance to universities of research, the flow of ideas across Europe—never mind the world—and the benefits and the money that are gained because we have world-class universities. We should pay attention to them, to every single survey of industry opinion that has been conducted, and to all the other warnings and assessments that have been undertaken. It is no longer any good for members of the leave campaign, every time a view is expressed that is counter to their argument, to wave their hands and say, "Well, they would say that, wouldn't they?"

**Tom Brake:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Hilary Benn:** I will, but then I must make a little more progress.

**Tom Brake:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when the Brexiters campaign on the issue of trade, they should be aware of the fact that India currently invests more in the United Kingdom than in all the other EU countries put together, and that the UK invests more in India than any other G20 country?

**Hilary Benn:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he has given me the opportunity to add to his point. We are the most successful country in the European Union—more successful than Germany, more successful than France—in attracting foreign direct investment. There are a number of reasons for that, some of which I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, which the Chair of the Select Committee welcomed; but there is no doubt that one of the reasons is the fact that we are part of a single market consisting of 500 million people.

**Mike Gapes:** My right hon. Friend mentioned the free trade agreements. Is it not a fact that since the European Union signed the free trade agreement with South Korea, the UK's trade with Korea has massively increased? We also have massive Korean investment in this country.

**Hilary Benn:** That is indeed the case, and it shows that we can have the best of both worlds because we are gaining from the trade deals that the European Union has negotiated at the same time as increasing our trade with other countries with which Europe does not currently have a trade deal.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the significant inward investment in the automotive trade in the north-east of England, not only at Renault-Nissan but at Nifco, at Elring Klinger and at A. V. Dawson in Middlesbrough, which are all part of the supply chain? If we had to wait seven years for a new trade deal to be reached, what would be the likelihood of Nissan or Hitachi continuing to invest in our region?

**Hilary Benn:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The north-east, along with Wales, probably understands better than any other part of the country just how important membership of the European Union is to the economic prospects of the communities and families that depend on the jobs that come from that investment, not least because the north-east exports a higher proportion of what it produces to Europe than to other parts of the world.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Hilary Benn:** Oh heavens! I shall give way to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and then to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham); then I must make some progress.

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Trade in the economy is very important, and the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that, but is there not something that is more

important? Did not his late, great father say that when he looked at the European Union, what he saw was clearly not democratic? Is not our democracy more fundamental than all the points he is making today, and should not the sovereign right to govern this country rest in this House and with the British people?

**Hilary Benn:** I would say to the hon. Gentleman that it does. My father and I were in agreement 41 years ago when we both campaigned to leave the Common Market, but the British people in their wisdom voted to stay. I change my mind, and my late, dear father did not. However, he taught me many things, one of which was stand up for what you believe in and to say what you think, and that is what I am doing from this Dispatch Box today. Also, every subsequent change relating to our membership of the European Union has been agreed by this House—by our democracy—and the referendum will give the British people the chance to take this really important decision. I am making my argument as to why we on this side of the House are passionately in support of remaining in the European Union.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on two points that in my view no one should be in any doubt about. First, trade is absolutely critical. All the countries with which I and all the other trade envoys deal are in no doubt that we will do much better with them by being within the European Union rather than outside it. I am also in no doubt that the 53 agreements that the European Union has entered into would take a very long time to replicate—if, indeed, that could be done at all. Lastly, on inward investment, I am also in no doubt that a wave of foreign direct investment that could come here is being held up at the moment as a result of uncertainty.

**Hilary Benn:** I agree with all three points that the hon. Gentleman has just made, particularly the last one. We all know that what business hates more than anything else is uncertainty, and at the moment there is great uncertainty about our future in the European Union. We need to end that uncertainty as quickly as possible, and we need to end it in the right way.

Greater than all the benefits that I have tried to describe thus far is, for me, the most significant contribution that the European idea has made to our lives. That is, quite simply, 70 years of peace on a continent that had been at war for centuries. Anyone who has visited those graveyards in France and Belgium, as many Members have, will understand the significance of that achievement. You only have to walk along the rows of graves in which the flower of two generations of young Europeans rest, having given their youth and their lives, to understand the force of that achievement.

That achievement did not come about by accident. It was the sheer determination and vision of Europe's founders to end the history of slaughter and to build something better out of the ashes of a still smouldering Europe that made it happen. The Schuman declaration said it all. It resolved to make a future war not merely unthinkable but materially impossible. What it achieved was peace, as the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames)—he is not here today—described most eloquently in his remarkable speech back in February. That peace even has the seal of approval of the hon.

Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who wrote two years ago in his biography of Churchill that Europe's securing of the peace had been a "spectacular success". What a pity that he has learned nothing from his own former wisdom.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that the people who lie in those graves fought and died for a united Europe? Did they not die for the right of their own countries and the occupied countries to govern themselves? Does he really believe that in the decade before the European Economic Community came into existence there was any risk of war between the democracies created at the end of the second world war?

**Hilary Benn:** Like many Members of this House, I lost an uncle in the second world war. He was an RAF pilot and he was killed three weeks after D-day. He fought, along with everybody else, against the ideology of Nazism and what it did, which is why the rise of the far right in Europe should give us all cause for concern and remind us of the dangers of the past. The growth and stability of the post-war period have led people to believe that that is all done and dusted, but it is not. It is still with us. The values we are fighting to uphold are the values of co-operation between free democracies that have come together of their own volition in the interests of maintaining peace and building something better for the future. That is the difference between those who argue to remain and those who think we should leave.

**Stephen Doughty:** My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. My grandfather and great-grandfather fought in those wars, and the fact that we have not had to endure such wars is great testament to the European project. Does he agree that we have moved on inexorably from the era of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece? We had fascism, the horrors of the Balkans and the situation in Cyprus, but Europe has taken us forward from many of those conflicts and instabilities on our continent.

**Hilary Benn:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should learn from history, and we should recall that Europe has acted as a magnet to countries by offering stability, the rule of law and other values. Despite the occasional irritations and problems that 28 member states trying to reach agreement can cause from time to time, Europe has been a powerful force for good in our continent, and we cast it aside at our peril. I believe we would do so to our regret.

Those are the facts of our membership. We know what membership gives us and we know what it involves. What is the other fact? It is very simply this. The answer to the honest question of what would happen if we left the European Union is that we do not know. We have heard a number of answers from the leave campaign during the debate so far, one of which is that it will all be fine; another is that we will get a better deal outside. We hear a lot of that. I recently took part in a debate in which I heard the argument that nothing needed to change. That is an odd argument, because if nothing needs to change why on earth are they campaigning so hard for us to leave the European Union? So, what will happen if we leave? The honest answer is that we do not

know—and there we have it: two facts. We know what remaining in the European Union will involve. We do not know what will happen if we leave.

I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the Foreign Secretary and his predecessor—both of whom it would be fair to describe as having been regarded as Eurosceptics—having now served in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are campaigning for Britain to remain in the European Union because they have seen at first hand precisely how being a member gives us influence in the world. We should therefore give thanks for the fact that this Government have not one but two departments of education in Whitehall. The first is called the Department for Education and the second is called the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is a shame that the Prime Minister has been unable to allow more Conservative Eurosceptics to serve in the FCO and go through its excellent retraining and conversion programme.

Turning to Syria, the House will welcome the renewed commitment in the Gracious Speech to support international efforts to bring peace to this brutalised and war-weary country and its long-suffering people. The civil war has raged for five years. Half the population have fled their homes. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 360,000 have lost their lives, mostly at the hands of President Assad, and Russian airstrikes have killed 1,700 civilians in the past six months alone. The determination of some of those fleeing that destruction to try to make it to Europe, despite the perilous, dangerous journey, shows their utter desperation. While the Government's offering of humanitarian aid has been exemplary, their offering of a home to those fleeing has not. Time and again, they have fallen short and have had to be shamed and forced into action. The immediate priority, as the Foreign Secretary said, is to enable the next round of peace talks to take place, and the ceasefire has to be observed for that to happen. It is unacceptable for the Assad regime to continue to attack opposition forces when they are expected to sit opposite his representatives at the table to try and negotiate a peaceful solution.

We also need humanitarian access. I was struck when Staffan de Mistura said five days ago how unacceptable it is that "well-fed, grown-up" soldiers blocked the delivery of baby food to the town of Darayya. If access is not significantly and speedily improved, we should use airdrops to reach civilians, and I welcome what the Foreign Secretary said on that a little earlier.

Daesh has taken brutal and cruel advantage of the civil war, and its ideology is spreading across north Africa and other parts of the world. The whole House has agreed that we must stand up to its barbarity. It is good to see reports that its grip, particularly in Iraq, has been weakened in recent months as a result of the efforts of the Iraqis, the peshmerga, and the international military coalition. However, we must also hold it to account for what it has done.

The UK can be proud of our consistent support for the International Criminal Court as a means of dealing with crimes against humanity and war crimes. There is no doubt that Daesh is killing people in Syria and Iraq because of their ethnicity, race and religion and that what it is doing has all the hallmarks of genocide, of crimes against humanity and of war crimes. Look what it has done to the Yazidis. When some Members, of

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which I was one, sat and listened to a young Yazidi woman describe how Daesh came to her village, killed all the men, murdered her mother, and took her into sexual slavery, we were forced to look into the darkness of human depravity. On 20 April, when the House voted for the Government to refer the crimes immediately to the ICC through the UN Security Council, Ministers abstained, but I hope they will now demonstrate to the House that they are prepared to take that forward. It is important that the evidence is preserved, so that those responsible are held to account in the end.

As we heard earlier today, many across the House have deep concerns about the alleged war crimes committed in Yemen and the hidden humanitarian disaster there. According to Oxfam, 80% of the population urgently need humanitarian assistance, and because of the risks for journalists it is an unreported humanitarian disaster. The Opposition have repeatedly called for an independent inquiry into alleged violations of international humanitarian law and for the Government immediately to suspend all arms sales to Saudi Arabia until an inquiry has taken place. There is mounting evidence of serious breaches of international humanitarian law and a clear risk that British-made weapons are being used, but the Government are burying their head in the sand.

The Foreign Secretary will be well aware of the number of UN officials who have spoken out on the matter, including the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, the special advisor on the prevention of genocide, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the special rapporteur on the right to food and the special advisor on the responsibility to protect. I do not need to repeat for the Foreign Secretary's benefit the words of the UN panel of experts on Yemen's final report, because part of what it had found was quoted earlier in the debate. UK and EU law could not be clearer. The Government should not grant arms export licences to a country if there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law. The Government are simply not taking their responsibilities seriously enough. The answers we received during today's urgent question do not really bear scrutiny.

**Mr Philip Hammond:** I must pick up on that last point. The urgent question related to equipment that has not been manufactured for two and a half decades. There can be no question of any supply of that type of equipment. I do not understand why the right hon. Gentleman makes that point.

**Hilary Benn:** I welcome the fact that further inquiries will be made about what Amnesty International has found, but I am making a broader point about repeated allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law. The Government's response seems to be that they will ask the Saudis to look at the matter and see what they say. It is time for an independent investigation.

**Alex Salmond:** If it was found that Saudi Arabia had used a cluster bomb that was manufactured in the UK—even one made some time ago—would that not in itself be a reason to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia?

**Hilary Benn:** It might depend on what aircraft or means was used to deliver it, because we have of course sold a large amount of military equipment to Saudi Arabia. There is mounting evidence of the use of cluster munitions, despite the denials that were reported once again to the House. I think the Foreign Secretary at one point said he believed we have got to a point at which we will have a commitment that such munitions are not being used, but I would like not only to have that commitment from the Saudi authorities but to see an absence of evidence on the ground, given what is being discovered by those who are examining what is occurring in the midst of this terrible conflict.

I welcome the Government's commitment in their legislative programme to ratify the Hague convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. We have been calling for that, and it will be an important step forward. I hope it will strengthen the UK's commitment to the protection of cultural heritage in conflict zones around the world, including, given UNESCO's concerns, in Yemen and Iraq.

As a member of the UN Security Council, Britain has a special responsibility to stand up for international law and fundamental rights. Indeed, the UK's security is best protected when we do so, which is why any proposal to repeal the Human Rights Act would damage our reputation and give comfort to those who seek to undermine human rights in their countries. I heard the Foreign Secretary when he talked about what the permanent secretary at the FCO said, but it is troubling when the permanent secretary goes to the Foreign Affairs Committee and says that human rights are

“not one of the top priorities”

in the Department. I say to the Foreign Secretary that if the permanent secretary meant that human rights are being mainstreamed, the message has not been terribly well communicated.

**Mr Philip Hammond:** Does the right hon. Gentleman think that Britain did not have a reputation in the world for the protection of human rights before the Human Rights Act?

**Hilary Benn:** Of course we had a reputation for that, and I am not saying we did not, but having taken the steps of, first, helping to found the European convention at the end of the second world war and, secondly, putting the Human Rights Act on the statute book, so that people in this country can access those rights without having to make the long journey to the European Court of Human Rights, it is a profound mistake to argue that we should weaken our position. Indeed, there are those who express concern about our membership of the European convention itself, and it is depressing that there are those who argue that, to “offer leadership” to the world, we should renege from the commitments we freely entered into, as some Conservative Members seek to do. [Interruption.] The former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), nods approvingly in my direction, and I pay tribute to those who are standing up against them.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) *rose*—

**Hilary Benn:** I will give way one last time and then bring my remarks to a close.

**Tom Tugendhat:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about human rights, but I stand with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on this. Britain's history of human rights goes back hundreds of years—to, indeed, Magna Carta. On the human rights act, we are arguing not about human rights as they are practised in England but about the stretch of the judiciary into areas that are correctly the role of Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman is arguing that human rights should be used to circumvent Parliament by using law to intervene in other areas.

**Hilary Benn:** I am not arguing that. Let us take the most famous case of all—voting rights for prisoners, a subject dear to the Home Secretary's heart. How many years ago was that judgment handed down? [*Interruption.*] Not that they should have voting rights—let me say that for the avoidance of doubt. Do prisoners in Britain have voting rights? No, they do not, because the way in which we constructed the Human Rights Act allows Parliament, in the end, to take that decision. Methinks those who argue that we should take these steps protest too much. We should be proud of our reputation, our history, and the foundations on which we have built our continuing commitment to human rights, including the European convention and the Human Rights Act, which the last Labour Government put on the statute book.

As the United Kingdom, we have always been at our best when we have been an outward-looking and confident nation. We helped to build the institutions that have given the world the best chance to make progress: the United Nations, NATO, and of course the European Union, where we were latecomers. Let us look at the challenges that our children and grandchildren will face: fighting climate change; reducing poverty; dealing with conflict—people fighting over religion, as we see currently, and over water, land and energy—the rise of the politics of the right; and dealing with the consequences of large numbers of people moving around the globe. Mark my words: that will be the story of this century. The question we have to ask ourselves is: what will give us the best chance to manage those challenges and deal with the changes they will see in their lives, just as we have seen in ours?

When I was born, the world's population was 2.7 billion, but by the time my grandchildren reach my age it will be about 10 billion. The British empire has gone and has been replaced by the Commonwealth. The Berlin wall has given way to the new democracies of Europe. We have seen the rise of terrorism, new global powers and the astonishing economic development of China. The old divide between the domestic and the foreign is increasingly eroding and becoming blurred because globalisation is transforming our world.

As a nation, in 30 days' time we will be confronted with a choice about how we will deal with that transformation. For me, it is a choice between optimism and pessimism. It is a choice between outward-facing patriotism and inward-looking nationalism—the former built on playing a proud and leading role through co-operation in the very institutions we helped to fashion, and the latter seeking to lure us into turning our back on them. Those are the two competing visions of Britain's future, and I hope that on 23 June the British people will vote for co-operation, because it represents the best hope we have for that future and for the lives of those who will come after us.

3.24 pm

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): I propose to resist the temptation to give the House my arguments in favour of Britain remaining in the European Union. [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Those Members of Parliament who find it irresistible to hear me on the subject made their way to the debate in Speaker's House last night, where I debated against, among others, my old colleague Lord Tebbit. On this occasion, I agreed so completely with what has been said by both the Foreign Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary that I thought I might desist, particularly as over the next 30 days I shall be making many more speeches on the subject.

This afternoon, I look forward with a certain amount of relief, after this interminable campaign, to the fact that this House and the Government are going to return to the government of the country on domestic issues. We can return to an agenda that will spare us from the fear of millions of criminal Turks coming to this country, our sovereignty being sacrificed to faceless men in Brussels and all the rest of it. A lot of serious issues are facing this country at home. They are described today as, “How to keep people safe at home and abroad, and how to protect our human rights”, so I shall turn to that.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Mr Clarke:** With great respect, I am trying to keep my remarks short. As I become more long-serving, I find that I get ever more garrulous, and I know that huge numbers of Members wish to speak in this debate, so if I may be allowed to, I will resist the temptation to give way, much though I normally enjoy it.

When I looked at the Queen's Speech, listened to it and heard it being analysed afterwards, it seemed to me that the Prime Minister was rather looking to his legacy. He has already become one of the longest-serving Prime Ministers since the war and he has announced that he is not going to be Prime Minister into the next Parliament, so this Queen's Speech has rather more of a theme than most Queen's Speeches have. He described it, using the slogan that we are all supposed to use now, as a “progressive, one nation” theme. I do not like slogans, but I can hardly object to that, as I have been trying to describe my own political views in those terms for years. But it also looks at disadvantage in society and improving the life chances of those who have disadvantages, and, in effect, tries to address the still weak state of meritocracy today. I was one of those who benefited from the brief window of meritocracy and social mobility that this country enjoyed quite a long time ago as a result of the Butler Act of 1944, although I hasten to add that I would not go back to that old system nationally or anything of that kind.

We all know that one of the worrying things in our society is a growing awareness of widening inequality, both of incomes, thanks to the absurd levels to which some corporate salaries have been allowed to rise over the past 10 years, and of opportunity for those born in the less advantaged parts of the country. The thing that I was mainly impressed by in looking at the contents of the Queen's Speech is how we are seized of that. This growing inequality is sensed by more and more people, and it is very real for many of our younger generation. Inequality of opportunity and of income is a subject that has always concerned those of the left, but in my

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opinion those of us who believe in free market economics should be just as concerned by this threat to the stability of our society as our socialist opposite numbers are. It behoves us to do something about it.

I therefore hope that the Children and Social Work Bill, which contains proposals to tackle the inadequacies in what we do for children in care and improve the operation of the adoption system, will be one of those measures—I will not go through the whole Queen's Speech—that gives positive effect to the agenda of recreating a fairer society in which opportunities are much more widely available to all sections of society.

The most prominent Bill in the Queen's Speech was on prison reform. Obviously, I very much welcome that. I say "obviously" because the Secretary of State for Justice and the Prime Minister, who made a very noticeable speech, have reinforced an agenda that our party first set out when we were in opposition before 2010. It is an agenda that I propounded and tried to give effect to as Justice Secretary for the first two and a half years of the Government.

I congratulate the Secretary of State for Justice, who I regret to say is not in his place, because he appears to have achieved more success in overcoming the hesitations in practice of some of the more senior members of the Government than I did. He has been able to promise things that I wish I had achieved and has a much bigger agenda than I was able to deliver. I got rid of indeterminate sentences and did a great deal to improve training for work in prisons by outside employers, among other things, but it looks as though there are things that will at last be tackled.

The problem is always that we have a fear in this House of the reaction to anything entitled "prison reform", because it is seen to be dangerously wet. In recent decades, both parties have been subject to the fear of the right-wing tabloids every time they have looked at this subject. It is not wet; it is part of protecting people from harm in this society that everything should contribute to the reduction of crime. When people are rightly sent to prison for criminal offences, it is an achievement if most of them do not return to crime, but become honest citizens when they are released.

I think that we can get public support for these changes, so long as we emphasise the fact that at the moment 48% of prisoners are convicted again—they return to crime—within 12 months of being released. That shows how little progress we have made in dealing not with the hard-core criminals who will be in prison for long periods of their life if the police succeed in catching them, but with all those who suffer from drug abuse and mental health problems; those who have never had a basic education and are not numerate or literate; and those who could benefit from training, preparation for work and rehabilitation to return them as honest citizens. I hope, therefore, that we implement these changes, as well as legislating for them.

I welcome Dame Sally Coates's report on education, which addresses the fact that although we have always tried to educate prisoners, what is delivered is very patchy and limited. I hope that we implement all of it. I welcome the interesting idea of the six reform prisons, but I hope that it does not mean that the most adventurous reforms are confined to those six prisons. I think that

we should keep an eye on the 48% figure and judge our progress in a few years' time on whether we are able, at last, to reduce it.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Mr Clarke:** No, I will not.

I do not think we will deliver much in this area unless we tackle one other problem, which is the enormous number of people we incarcerate. In large part, that is a response to the populist demands that have led to our toughening up sentencing for the past two decades. We now have 86,000 prisoners, which is about double the figure of 20 years ago when I was Home Secretary. As Justice Secretary, I signed up to quite substantial reductions in public spending in my Department on the basis that we would reduce the number of prisoners to something like the level that we ought to have in our jails. I was not able to deliver that and after I left, the number started drifting up again. That has the effect that we do not have the money to deliver programmes in areas such as education, which I have mentioned.

**Crispin Blunt:** Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Clarke:** No, I will not give way; sorry.

Between 2012-13 and 2014-15, there was an 85% fall in the number of prisoners taking A-level-standard qualifications and a 42% drop in those going for Open University qualifications. When we lower the number of prisoners, we will be able to finance what we wish to do. In my opinion, proper rehabilitation programmes cannot be delivered in overcrowded slums.

If I went through all the other topics in the Bill that I would like to support, I would start to exclude other Members from the debate, which, as I have said, I am anxious not to do and which I promise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not do. However, may I briefly welcome the criminal finances Bill?

On the fight against crime—I think my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is replying to the debate—we in this country are very bad at dealing with white-collar crime, and there is growing awareness of that. If someone wishes to rob a bank, they go to the LIBOR market; they do not put on a balaclava and pick up a shotgun—that is much less profitable. At last we are starting to do something about that, and I hope I can be reassured that the Bill will tackle not just tax evasion, which is quite rightly high on the public agenda, but money laundering. London is still the money-laundering capital of the world. For an African despot or a serious international criminal, London is the best place to put their money, because they can trust the bankers to look after it and not to steal it from them. I welcome the fact that we are going to improve the reporting of suspicious activities. I hope we will also impose a duty on those at the head of the institutions involved to ensure that they take positive steps to stop those working for them encouraging such activities.

I will continue to follow progress on the Investigatory Powers Bill. We have to get the balance right between the powers our agencies must have in order to deal with

the threat of terrorism and crime, and the privacy that we retain in our society to defend the freedoms we want.

I particularly welcome the fact that there was no mention whatever in the Queen's Speech of repealing the Human Rights Act or any legislation on human rights. I hope that means we are proceeding on this front with very considerable caution. I looked at the speech by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in which she was reported to have said things on the subject of the European convention on human rights. Actually, what she said was rather ambiguous; it was not a change of Government policy. I hope I am correctly reassured that there is not the slightest question of our giving up the convention or trying to weaken the jurisdiction in Strasbourg.

I wait to hear a good reason for getting rid of the Human Rights Act and for stopping British judges applying the principles of the convention. When we are taken to Strasbourg, which is where people will go again if we get rid of the Human Rights Act, we lose only 2% of cases. I do not get frightfully worried about air hostesses being allowed to wear crucifixes with their uniform, which is the kind of case we actually lose. As someone has rightly pointed out, the Council of Europe has systems, so we are not in fact being forced to give prisoners voting rights.

Our reputation for human rights will be damaged if we are seen to retreat from where we are. The Court in Strasbourg and the convention are the best levers we have to make sure that liberal values are defended in Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Georgia and other countries, which do abide by the judgments in Strasbourg—and they get defeated many more times there than we do. I therefore trust that very considerable thought is being given to this subject. I am not aware of any harm being done at the moment.

Of course I believe in the supremacy of Parliament, but even Parliament must pass legislation consistent with the high standards of human rights that we have always had. I see no harm whatever in British judges, or judges in Strasbourg, being allowed occasionally to challenge the way in which our legislation is interpreted by officials in the Home Office or elsewhere, and even occasionally by Ministers, when that interpretation really ought to be reconsidered.

Subject to that, and assuming we are all putting human rights in our foreign policy, as the Foreign Secretary eloquently said we are, for which he has my full approval, I think we will see, once the slight madness of this referendum is over—I am of the generation who do not think that referendums are the best way of determining this country's foreign policy or the basis of its trade and economic prosperity in tomorrow's world—that this is not the programme of a Government who have been driven off their agenda, but the very solid reforming programme of a Government who have the best interests of the country in mind. We should be able to achieve some very real social advances if we implement it.

3.39 pm

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). However, I have to start by disagreeing

with him. He claimed a few moments ago that the leave campaign was saying that millions of Turkish criminals were about to flood the country. That is not true. The actual claim of the leave campaign is that only 1 million are coming over in the next eight years, and not all of them are criminals! Indeed, I have here the quote from Vote Leave:

“Since the birth rate in Turkey is so high, we can expect to see an additional million people added to the UK population from Turkey alone within eight years.”

That accompanied a statement from a Government Minister who had never heard of the word “veto” in relation to the accession of states.

I am grateful to *The Times* this morning for adding just a little insight into this subject. Under the heading, “Turkish delight”, it says:

“One of Vote Leave's key warnings is the threat to public services posed by Turkey joining the EU. But what's this? Big-name Outsiders Johnson, Daniel Hannan and Douglas Carswell are all listed as founder members of Conservative Friends of Turkey, set up to ‘lobby in favour of Turkish membership of the EU’”.

It is now clear that such are the Machiavellian tactics of the leave campaign that that triumvirate have been campaigning for Turkish membership of the European Union so that they can use that as a reason for the removal of Britain from the Union. What an extraordinary array of political talent and consistency we face!

I want to restrict myself to three points, because we have been well round the houses today with Foreign Office questions, the statement, and now this debate. I want to make an argument about British and Scottish values with regard to immigration; to talk a little about Libya, because I am not sure that we are hearing the full story from the Government about where we are with military action there; and lastly to talk a bit about the European referendum, and particularly “Project Fear”—a subject of which I have some experience and knowledge from the past.

First, I will look at the question of immigration. The nonsense from the leave campaign on immigration can be juxtaposed with the reality of where we are in Scotland with many immigration cases. I want to talk about the plight of the Brain family—Gregg Brain, Kathryn Brain, and their son Lachlan, who is seven years old. This family came from Australia to Dingwall in the Scottish highlands as part of the Homecoming Scotland programme, which was initiated by my predecessor as First Minister, Lord McConnell, and carried forward by my Administration. The family came—this was heavily advertised in Australia—to encourage those of Scottish descent to return to Scotland to help re-populate and reinvigorate the highlands and other areas of Scotland.

Gregg and Kathryn both have Scottish roots. They first visited Scotland on their honeymoon in 2005, and returned in 2011 to do further research on whether a move to Scotland would be the right thing for them to do—to up sticks from Australia and invest accumulated capital in Scotland to make a new life. Between 2005 and 2011, they applied for visas, and Kathryn eventually secured a student visa after enrolling in a degree in Scottish history and archaeology. Her husband and son were listed as her dependants. Kathryn finished her degree last year, and the family's visa expired in December 2015. The Home Office has rejected their case to stay. It is believed that a further visa application was rejected as they had not succeeded in finding jobs that completely

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fulfilled the visa requirements. This is despite the fact that Gregg Brain had been working, and was working, but then had to give up his job as a result of the Home Office decision.

This family—let me stress that their son Lachlan has known no other home than Dingwall and Scots Gaelic is his first language—are fully integrated into the community. They have massive community support. They have the support of just about every Scottish MP in his House. They have overwhelming support from the newly elected Members of the Scottish Parliament, as well as their own two excellent constituency Members in both Parliaments. This story affects an area where the dominant issue for the past two centuries has been not fear of immigration, but fear of emigration. This family, having so much to contribute and having already contributed so much to our country, having been attracted to it by a Scottish Government-sponsored initiative inviting them to come, and having qualified and worked and sustained themselves, are now to be kicked out of the country next Tuesday unless the Home Secretary and her Ministers have the courtesy to look again at this matter and exercise the ministerial discretion that most certainly should be exercised in this case. If a Home Office Minister would like to say a word, I will gladly give way at this stage.

The silence from the Treasury Bench should be a matter of shame. There is a substantial injustice being inflicted on this family and a substantial discredit on our country. This is not just an immigration issue or a community issue—

**Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): And human rights.

**Alex Salmond:** And a human rights issue, as the hon. Lady rightly says. The Home Office is turning its face against the massive support of just about every parliamentarian from Scotland and refusing to accept and acknowledge that this family came to our country on a Government-sponsored scheme. I do hope that Ministers will find it in their heart to look at this case in the next seven days.

Secondly, I come to the subject of Libya. The Foreign Secretary referred a few minutes ago to his visit to Tripoli, where he said the UK was ready to provide training to the new Administration's armed forces. He said that

“it will be possible for us and our partners to support the military training programme.”

Such a mission would not require a Commons vote because, he said:

“That does not extend to non-combat missions.”

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who is in his place, rejected the idea of a training mission, stating that:

“Even if you say it is just a training mission rather than a combat one, any foreign troop presence in Tripoli will be seen as a Western intervention.”

The commander of Libya's air force warned:

“If any foreign soldier touches our soil with his foot, all Libyan people will be united against him. Our problems will be aggravated with the coming of foreign troops.”

Interviewed in *RT*, former UK ambassador to Libya Oliver Miles warned against “loose talk” of military intervention in the collapsing state. He said:

“There's been talks for weeks and months of the possibility of military intervention. But I don't think it's helpful at the moment because intervention is not what they need.”

Following the Foreign Affairs Committee's visit to north Africa in mid-April, the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), wrote to the Foreign Secretary accusing him of being “less than candid” and

“deliberately misleading to the uninformed reader”

over plans to send British troops to join an Italian-led training mission.

In a few weeks' time, on 6 July, the Chilcot report will be published. One of the key issues that many of us hope will be identified and brought out in that report is that of pre-commitment—what commitments were made in 2002 by the then Prime Minister to the American President that dictated all his subsequent actions. I ask the Foreign Secretary for a straight answer to this question: what, if any, commitments have been made in relation to intervention in Libya at this stage—not just on combat roles, which the Defence Secretary referred to earlier—or is it genuinely the case that, before any such commitments are undertaken, there will be a debate and vote in this House to ascertain the wisdom or otherwise of such an intervention?

Finally, I come to the European campaign and to “Project Fear”. The term was actually devised in an internal briefing in the Better Together campaign in the Scottish referendum, where the writer self-described the campaign as “Project Fear”. I want briefly to discuss why I think that is entirely the wrong campaign and the wrong tactic to adopt.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has substantial form on the matter. On 13 November 2011 he gave an interview on BBC Scotland television in which he predicted a collapse in inward investment in Scotland because of the referendum of 2014. That was followed by record years of inward investment in Scotland in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The current Secretary of State for Scotland had the brass neck in a statement on 17 June last year to claim the credit for the record inward investment figures of 2014. No one in the leave campaign should be surprised by the nefarious activities of Her Majesty's Treasury, given the even more nefarious activities it engaged in during the Scottish referendum campaign.

My question today is whether this sort of material wins hearts and minds in a referendum campaign. I do not think it does.

**Mike Gapes:** You lost the referendum.

**Alex Salmond:** I hear from the Labour Benches that we lost the referendum in Scotland. That is a matter of fact and record.

**Mike Gapes:** You lost; we won.

**Alex Salmond:** Yes, that is true. That referendum was launched with the yes campaign at 28% of the vote. The eventual vote for the yes campaign was 45%. The present campaign on Europe has been launched with a much tighter margin between the two sides, and if the remain



campaign loses 1% a month during the campaign, the result will not be as I or the hon. Gentleman would wish.

**Mike Gapes:** Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman wants remain to lose because he could then pursue his agenda of holding another referendum on independence within two years? His party is hardly doing anything to campaign to remain in the United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. No. Mr Gapes, senior Member you are, with a lot to offer, but you also want to speak, and I do not want to be the man who puts you at the bottom of the list. Between us, we can all get there. Short interventions if you must, but it would be better if you did not intervene.

**Alex Salmond:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) should read today's pamphlet, "The EU and You", released by the Scottish Government, which explains in a considered and proper way why European Union membership is of benefit to Scotland. Not even the most rabid of the leave campaign could describe that pamphlet as anything resembling "Project Fear". It makes a considered case for why EU membership benefits Scotland.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the ICM poll for the UK today, he will see that the two sides are level in an online poll. In the ICM poll in Scotland, the margin is nearly 2:1 for remain. Given that even the hon. Gentleman will have noticed the diminishing fortunes of his party in Scotland and the rising fortunes of the SNP, does that not suggest that the campaign that we are conducting in Scotland is rather more successful in winning hearts and minds to the European cause than the campaign that is being conducted across the rest of the country?

A case in point is the release of the Treasury statistics on the economy yesterday—the expectations analysis. An expectations model is the ultimate GIGO model—garbage in, garbage out. The result is manufactured from the input to the model. The Treasury analysis suggests a 6% wipe-out of GDP from a Euro exit. No other credible forecaster is suggesting anything like that effect. Oxford Economics suggests 1.3% and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation suggests 1.5%. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which uses the Treasury model, is suggesting 2.3%.

**Mr Baron:** I agree with the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making about "Project Fear". It is terribly counterproductive. However, we should always remember that those who are peddling "Project Fear" are broadly the same group of people who predicted doom and gloom if we did not join the euro, so they have form. There is one ray of hope. Lord Rose, leader of the remain campaign, has said that if we were to leave the EU, there would be better control of immigration for the sake of public services—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. No. Now we have to be serious with the House because Members want to get in. I have just mentioned the need

for short interventions. Please do not abuse the Chair, because what you are doing is abusing colleagues on both sides and that is not good for anybody. I want to get as many people into the debate as possible and, ideally, I want to get everybody in.

**Alex Salmond:** It is ironic that the Conservative Members who have been complaining loudly about "Project Fear" hardly raised a peep when the same campaign was conducted against the Scottish people some two years ago, so I would claim over the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) at least a right of consistency on these matters.

Established and credible forecasters are indicating enough of the economic damage that I believe would be done to this country by an exit, without having to manufacture and inflate statistics which brings the whole argument into disrepute. It is enough for people to know that there will be an economic impact, without trying to inflate that impact beyond what is reasonable.

I commend the Governor of the Bank of England, who has gone no further than saying that the scenarios "could possibly include a technical recession".

The Bank of England has demonstrated in both the Scottish referendum and, indeed, this referendum campaign how public servants should behave in terms of offering information and considered analysis.

The major danger to the remain campaign is not the arguments of the leave campaign, because the leave campaign is fundamentally split between those who see the UK's future after an exit as similar to that of Switzerland or Norway, and those who think it can be some sort of transatlantic Singapore. That fundamental division cannot be resolved, because the way to minimise economic damage from an exit would be to adopt the Norwegian model, but the majority of the leave campaign will not subscribe to that because it would bring with it acceptance of the single market, various regulations and, of course, free movement of labour. That is the fundamental problem with the leave campaign.

The remain campaign across the UK should at the moment be as far ahead as we are in Scotland. The fact that we are not is an indication that the campaign should be recalibrated into one that starts to win hearts and minds, and that addresses some of the issues to which the Foreign Secretary alluded. Sixty-six years after the Schuman declaration, we can say that the European Union has contributed to peace, stability and prosperity across Europe. Over that time, building a single market of 500 million people has been no mean achievement. For Opposition parties in particular, the social gains for every family and every trade unionist in this country—things that the Government do not like to talk about—are a very substantial reason for not leaving the EU behind. It would also add to the credibility of our arguments if we accepted—as, indeed, the Leader of the Opposition did in his speech—the problems and difficulties that people have with the European Union.

The fishing community in Scotland, which takes 60% of the landings, are hugely sceptical, because, of all the EU policies that could be considered disastrous, the common fisheries policy is the greatest. On 11 May I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, suggesting that support for the remain campaign might be enhanced if, as part of the UK's presidency of the European Council

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next year, he agreed that the Scottish fisheries Minister should co-chair—with the UK fisheries Minister, the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. Incidentally, the Prime Minister was very open to such a suggestion when he came to office in 2010, as indeed was the Foreign Secretary's predecessor, William Hague.

I suggested that a response to that invitation before purdah in three days' time would be helpful to my former constituents in Banff and Buchan. I was therefore delighted to receive a letter last week from an unnamed correspondence officer at the direct communications unit at Downing Street, saying that my request was being considered. However, if the Foreign Secretary is genuinely interested in strengthening the position of the remain campaign, I hope he will indicate today to the fishing communities of Scotland that the Government will take advantage of the opportunity provided by the European Council presidency to address their needs and iron out many of the difficulties in the current regulations.

SNP Members would have wished the Government to address the fears that many of our constituents have about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership without being forced to do so by an amendment, because there are genuine fears that a court process may allow an aggressive intervention in the national health service. Last week, I had a meeting with the Baltic state and Scandinavian ambassadors, who indicated that when this Government took office, they invested great hopes in the Prime Minister's northern agenda—the reform agenda for the European Union that he was putting forward at that time—but their view and belief is that the agenda has been deflected by a referendum that is about British exceptionalism as opposed to genuine reform of the European institutions.

My submission is that if we are to have a campaign that people will endorse and give an enthusiastic response to, that will prevent the danger of differential voting between enthusiastic Brexiteers and those who are cowed into submission by the Government's "Project Fear" and that will mobilise people to get out of their houses and into the polling stations, the Government will have to rise above the campaign they are fighting so far and actually make a positive case for the European Union.

4.1 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be able to participate in this debate on the Gracious Speech. If I may say so, it was an immense pleasure to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary so clearly present and articulate Conservative principles of international engagement, particularly our adherence to rules-based international systems. We have a long tradition in that area, and it is perhaps one of our greatest offerings to the world. I want to return to that in a few moments, but the way he expounded it seemed to me to put it with absolutely crystal clarity that the United Kingdom sees itself as belonging to a rules-based system that helps to maintain values and to further freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

I have no doubt that, as we meet, we face really serious challenges in promoting those values, whether from Russia, which appears in some respects to be descending into a gangster state given its gross violations of international law, or from the anarchy in the middle east. It is quite clear that on our doorstep—very close to us, and capable of affecting us—there is a whole series of processes that, quite frankly, appear on any analysis to be retrograde. That must inform the entire way in which we look at how we pursue our own policies.

I am delighted that the Government have made progress in Committee on the Investigatory Powers Bill. I recognise that it is absolutely essential to have the tools to protect ourselves properly against those who seek to do us harm. I understand that the Bill is shortly to return to the House on Report, and I very much hope that we will be able to make further progress to ensure that the Government's completely legitimate aim of protecting us all in this country can be reconciled with some of the concerns that people have about personal liberty. I am pretty convinced that they can be reconciled, and I look forward to playing a part in that process when the Bill returns to the House, no doubt along with other members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing.

I will also take a great interest in the extremism Bill. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that I have some considerable concerns about how this legislation can be framed in practice to reconcile it with the right of freedom of expression, which applies even when the matters expressed are ones with which we heartily disagree. We have to be very careful. There is a tendency within democracy—perhaps for understandable reasons of electoral advantage—to stay silent in the face of comments with which we may disagree where we nevertheless would like at least to encourage people to consider giving us their support. The problem with legislation of this kind is that it might both antagonise people who express points of view that in practice are incompatible with the furtherance and survival of democracy but at the same time subtly free us, as parliamentarians, from the duty of challenging those people. We need to look to what we do as parliamentarians just as much as to any legislation that we seek to enact.

That brings me to my two key points about rules-based international systems. Such systems are indeed the United Kingdom's principal gift to the world. I once asked the Foreign Office how many treaties we had signed up to; although it was reluctant to go back beyond 1834, it accepted that since then we had signed up to more than 13,000 that were still extant. More than 700 contain arbitral mechanisms for resolving disputes, whereby the United Kingdom undertakes to accept the binding judgment of a tribunal or arbitrator in respect of the treaty. The EU treaties—or for that matter the European convention on human rights—are no different from any of the others when it comes to the UK's intentions in having signed up to them.

What are we to make of some of my colleagues here in Parliament, who, for example, say that not only do they want the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union but that when we have had a vote in support of that we should not take the lawful route of invoking article 50 of the Lisbon treaty, but instead should merely legislate in Parliament to delete those aspects of the treaty that appear onerous or incompatible

with our own views? What they are advocating is no different from President Putin's saying that it is legitimate to annex Crimea because the Russian Duma has said that it is an acceptable thing to do. But that is the reality of some—I emphasise “some”—of the very strange utterances that we are hearing in the course of the debate on the EU referendum. Not only are there policy differences on the future, but there is a willingness to articulate suggestions that the United Kingdom should adopt an anarchic approach to our international obligations.

That brings me to my principal point, namely that in the Gracious Speech there is a further reference to enacting a Bill of Rights. I will make it clear that there may be arguments as to why the United Kingdom might profitably seek to have a Bill of Rights. As time goes by, I begin to think that the widespread constitutional changes as a result of devolution are of such a character that providing a constitutional framework in which devolution can operate might be of merit. I recognise that that is an enormous task to take on, and do not in any way criticise my right hon. Friends in the Government for being reluctant to embark upon it, but within that context I can see that a Bill of Rights might play some key role; indeed, the idea that we might have a Bill of Rights was discussed back in the early 1990s, before we decided to enact the Human Rights Act.

I confess that it is quite clear that that is not what my colleagues in the Government have in mind. What they have in mind is very unclear—indeed, that is part of the problem—but it is certainly not that. It appears to range from some minor cosmetic changes to the Human Rights Act—on that, I would simply echo the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that if that is really what is intended, what on earth is the point?—to the suggestion that some radical change to the Human Rights Act and to the text of the convention could be effected, a change that, as far as I can see, would then almost automatically place us in breach of our obligations under the European convention.

The European convention is not a perfect document, and I have no doubt that its interpretation by the European Court of Human Rights has at times also been imperfect. To put it bluntly, however, in my view it constitutes without the slightest doubt the single most important lever that has ever been devised on this planet for improving human rights, not only in Europe but worldwide. The United Kingdom's ambivalent position on the convention is doing us immense reputational damage, and it is also damaging the effectiveness of that convention. The United Kingdom's position is invoked by Mr Putin to justify Russian intransigence in implementing judgments by the European Court of Human Rights, and in the past it has been invoked by the President of Kenya when justifying a failure to co-operate with the International Criminal Court, which is at the centre of the Foreign Secretary's efforts to promote human rights worldwide. There are also other examples, including by signatory states such as Ukraine.

As we debate this matter, and as the Government consider what to do about a Bill of Rights, we must bear it in mind that this is not an internal conversation; it is one that goes to the very heart of the principles that the Foreign Secretary so clearly set out. This debate should be conducted in a way that reflects that, and that also reflects the immense changes that have been taking

place at the European Court of Human Rights, thanks—he was very modest about it—to the efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe and the Brighton Declaration. We must consider how the convention is operating today and how it is applied in this country through the Human Rights Act, and not just how it was applied 10 years ago. If we keep that in mind, we may come up with some sensible conclusions, although I urge my Front-Bench colleagues to ensure that any consultation period is long enough to enable us all to consider and participate in it fully.

With that in mind, I was pleased to hear the way that the Government articulated their adherence to an international rules-based system this afternoon. That is one of the things that brought me into the Conservative party, although our adherence to and belief in such a system is not exclusive to us, and is probably shared widely across the House. In those circumstances, we must uphold it, and if we do that we will come up with the right conclusions on the legislation proposed by the Government this Session.

4.12 pm

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I would like to say a few words about the counter-extremism Bill and human rights. First, however, I pay tribute to the shadow Foreign Secretary for his speech, with which I strongly agreed. It was profound, principled and progressive, and without wanting him to think that I want some sort of promotion—I am so beyond that at this point—I should say I thought it was exceptionally good. He does great credit to our party, to the House and to politics, and I thank him for what he said.

I was glad to hear the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is a weighty Member of this House and speaks as a former Home Secretary, Justice Secretary, Health Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is well and truly a “former”, and I agreed with an awful lot of what he said. In fact, I agreed with everything he said about prison reform and Europe. I find that quite traumatic, because when I was first in the House, he was sitting in Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet and was not to be agreed with on everything, or indeed anything. However, today I agreed with what he said. I also now find myself elevated to the status of a “former”, albeit not one as weighty as the right hon. and learned Gentleman. In this House, one thing about “formers” is that we must crack on with our speeches and not make them too long—that was a reference to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), not to the right hon. and learned Members for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) and for Rushcliffe.

I want to mention two measures in the Queen's Speech. The first is the counter-extremism Bill. I have the privilege of chairing the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who sits on the Committee and has a particular interest in mental health and human rights, is also in the Chamber.

The Government have a duty to protect us—a responsibility that any and every Government take with the utmost seriousness. That is undoubtedly uncontested ground, but when it comes to how to tackle terrorism, specifically the task of countering Daesh-inspired terrorism,

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there is no consensus. The Government's approach, set out in the counter-extremism strategy, appears to be based on the assumption that there is an escalator that starts with religious conservatism and ends up with support for jihadism, and that religious conservatism therefore is the starting point in the quest to tackle violence. However, it is by no means proven or agreed that extreme religious views, in particular religious conservatism, are in and of themselves an indicator of, or even correlated with, support for jihadism. If there are to be, under the new Bill, banning orders, extremism disruption orders and closure orders, it has to be clear that they are banning disruption and closing something that will lead to violence, not just something of which the Government disapprove.

The second issue is that if the Government are going to clamp down on Islamic religious conservatism in the cause of tackling violence, is that discrimination that can be justified, or will it serve merely to give rise to justified grievance? Everyone seems to agree that the most precious asset in the fight against terrorism is the relationship between the authorities—the police, the schools and the councils—and the Muslim communities of this country. We must guard against any undermining of the relationship between the authorities and the Muslim community, which would thereby make the fight against terrorism even harder. The last thing we must do is anything that fosters the alienation that can lead to radicalisation.

The third issue is the problem of taking conservative religious views in the Muslim community as an indicator of future terrorism if the same beliefs in evangelical Christianity or Orthodox Judaism would not be seen as prompting the need for any action. Are the Government going to discriminate and seek to justify that, or will they be indiscriminate and annoy and concern everybody?

The fourth issue is the question of definition. This was hinted at by the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) in his intervention. Even if there was reliable evidence of the escalator from extreme views to violence, if the law, in the form of banning orders, closure orders and extremist disruption orders, is to be invoked, there needs to be clarity and consensus around the definition. It is far from clear that there is an accepted definition of what constitutes non-violent extremism, or, indeed, extremism. In the counter-extremism strategy, the Government describe extremism as the

“vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”.

Now, I am not tolerant of the beliefs of those who are homophobic and I do not respect those who regard women as inferior. Which is the extremism: their beliefs or my intolerance of their beliefs? If we denounce our judiciary as biased Islamophobes, is that undermining the rule of law or is that the exercise of free speech? I have done a certain amount of denouncing the judiciary for all sorts of things in the past, but I would not have regarded myself as extremist—I was just pointing out that they were sexist and needed to be replaced by many more women judges.

The fifth issue is whether it is better to suppress views or to subject them to challenge. Many in the higher education sector say that for their students they believe

it is better to challenge abhorrent views rather than to repress them, but do we allow the same approach for school-age children? Some have argued that it simply should be seen as a question of child safeguarding, but although there is a consensus around the nature of child neglect, physical abuse or sexual abuse, from which children have to be safeguarded, there is no such consensus around the definition of extremism from which children should be safeguarded. We can all understand the definition of safeguarding; it is just a question of what we are safeguarding children from. In relation to extremism, there is no such shared consensus or definition. The difficulty around these issues should lead the Government to tread with great care. They should publish the Bill in draft and allow extensive debate and discussion. We should listen with particular attention to those who would be expected to apply for and enforce these orders, such as the police, educational establishments and councils, and to the Muslim community.

I completely agree with everything that the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield said about the repeal of the Human Rights Act and its replacement with a British Bill of Rights. We have not yet seen the consultation, but, when we do, it will again be important that the Government tread carefully. They should ensure that human rights remain universal, rather than simply retaining the popular and carving out the unpopular. The legal protection of human rights is important for everyone, even those who are justifiably the subject of public hostility.

The Government should not do anything that makes it more difficult for people here to enforce their rights in the UK courts, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said. I had to trek all the way to Strasbourg to get my rights. Had we had the Human Rights Act, I would have been exonerated seven years earlier and at much less expense to the Government. Neither should they do anything that would disrupt the devolution settlement in Scotland or the peace agreement in Northern Ireland, of which the Human Rights Act is part, as was made clear to us on our visit to Scotland and in evidence submitted to our Committee from Northern Ireland.

The Foreign Secretary acknowledged that this country is seen as a champion of human rights around the world, and the Government should be mindful of how what the UK does affects those in other countries who are fighting for their rights but who do not have the democracy and rights we have. Our adherence to the framework of international human rights standards, which includes the European convention, is a beacon to which those campaigning for rights in other countries look and demand in their own countries. That was made clear to us when we visited the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where people, whether from Poland or Russia, basically told us, “If you leave the European convention, we're done for.” If our Government were to abandon the convention, it would have a devastating effect on the progress of human rights in other countries.

No Government like any court telling them what to do. Legislators, elected as they are, do not like to be constrained by unelected judges. Parliament does not like to be so restrained. Governments, having got elected and into government, like even less to be constrained. That feeling is multiplied when the judicial ruling comes from—perish the thought!—abroad, but even the best

intentioned Government need to be subject to the rule of law. Governments can abuse their power, on purpose or by mistake, so oversight by the courts is essential. International standards, presided over by international courts, are important abroad and to us too. If the Government do not agree with a court ruling, they can gnash their teeth or try to get the court to think again in a subsequent case, but their disagreeing with a judgement does not justify their rejecting the jurisdiction of the court concerned.

In conclusion, it is easy to promise to tackle extremism, to whip up hostility to court rulings and to make “human rights” dirty words, but when it comes to legislating on counter-terrorism and amending our human rights framework the Government need to tread carefully, consult widely and work on the basis of consensus. What I have heard in the debate so far gives me confidence that there are Members on both sides of the House, as there are in the House of Lords, who will make sure the Government do exactly that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am now introducing a five-minute limit. I know it is disappointing but it is the way to get everybody in.

4.24 pm

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** I shall try to proceed with Twitter-like brevity in this Twitter age, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I want to reinforce the points made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) on prisons, although I gently remind him that, given the position we inherited, there would now be 96,000 people in prison had we not done anything. That the number has stabilised at 85,000 is a signal achievement, therefore, even if it is disappointing that it has not gone down.

On the European convention on human rights, I entirely endorse the sentiments expressed in the speeches of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). I do so having just returned from Russia with the Foreign Affairs Committee.

While pausing to put on record my thanks to Laurie Bristow, our ambassador, and his team in Russia for the programme they put on for us, I should say that part of it included meeting human rights activists in Russia. The convention is often the only resort they have as they go through the Russian courts. The Russian legal system is presided over by a Duma passing laws that are going in an illiberal direction, but there is at least a contested space of some kind. It is possible to get some protection, and overseeing that is the protection provided by the convention itself. We had some good briefings while we were in Russia, and the message came back clearly to us that this House should think about Russian human rights activists when we are considering British support for the European convention. Issues such as whether a few prisoners should have the right to vote stand pretty small in comparison with the quality of the work being done there and the courage behind it.

When it comes to reflecting on our overall relations with Russia, it is the case that they are absolutely in the deep freeze right now. Our bilateral relations are in an

extremely poor place. I am struck by the fact that both the Russian mission here in London and our mission in Moscow are largely obstructed by tit-for-tat measures that prevent them from carrying out their duties effectively. Both missions are reduced to that situation, with both complaining about the measures imposed on them.

In our meeting with a Russian official in the Russian Foreign Office who oversees British affairs, I suggested that it might be an idea to start relaxing some of the measures on British representation in Moscow to begin to try to get out of this downward spiral. Let us see if some micro-measures can be made to make the work of British diplomats easier and start this process off.

What has gone wrong, of course, is the strategic relationship fall-out at the end of the cold war. Probably rightly, the west decided to secure the position of central and eastern European people, but the price was the failure subsequently to get an effective strategic relationship with Russia. That is now being made infinitely more difficult by Russia's departure from the international rules of the road.

There is an issue about whether we are going to try to help the Russians out of the cul-de-sac that they have got themselves into. Even if it is initially at the level of cultural exchanges and students coming over here and so forth, we should invest in this relationship in any way we can. It is a very important relationship; Russia is a very important country. That is why it becomes even more critical when a country of that size is under the leadership that it is—a leadership that underneath it all has a deep lack of self-confidence, even though tactically it might feel strong.

Finally, on the European Union debate, I thought the first part of the shadow Foreign Secretary's speech was terrific, but then he set up the Aunt Sallies about the opposition case. There are two internationalisms competing here, and there are very good arguments to show why geopolitically the United Kingdom has a choice here. I believe we need positive arguments on both sides. I cannot go into those arguments because of the time limit, but I urge all colleagues to be positive in how they present their case on this issue.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Let me say that Chris Elmore's will be a maiden speech. I call Chris Elmore.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

4.29 pm

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to follow the distinguished Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in what is my maiden speech in this House. It is, I hope, the first of many contributions that I will make in representing the people of Ogmore, as long as I am able to catch the Speaker's eye.

I make my speech with an enormous sense of pride and a significant amount of humility. I am proud to have been elected to this House by the people of Ogmore, and to represent and work for them in Parliament. To me, there is no greater honour. I am humbled by the trust that they have placed in me to represent them as their Member of Parliament, and I shall never forget

[Chris Elmore]

the opportunity that they have given me. I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to all my constituents who voted for me. As for those who voted for my opponents, or did not vote at all, I hope to prove in the years ahead that I am worthy of their future support. I now strive to serve all my constituents to the best of my ability throughout my time in the House.

It is, of course, customary to pay tribute to one's predecessor when delivering a maiden speech. Many Members have been elected in by-elections, some following the tragic passing of the previous Member and some owing to the retirement of the previous Member because of ill health, but very few will succeed the previous Member because that Member has been elected to a new office. I wonder whether I am unique, in the modern age of devolution, in that my predecessor is—I am pleased to say—not only alive and well, in a fit state of health, but still representing the same constituency as he did in the House so diligently until only a few weeks ago. In the 19 days since my election, I have been reminded by many of my constituents that I have “big shoes to fill”. One constituent informed me last Saturday, “If you can be half as good as Huw, you will do all right, boy.”

Huw Irranca-Davies's contribution to the House, as a constituency Member, a Minister and a Select Committee Chair, has been significant. His work as a Wales Office and environment Minister has earned him a reputation as a champion of environmental issues, and I am confident that he will now make a significant contribution in the National Assembly for Wales. I know that Huw's dedication to the numerous communities that make up the Ogmores constituency has earned him the respect of many of those who are now “our” constituents, and that I do indeed have “big shoes to fill”. I am fortunate to be working alongside him, able to ask for advice when I need it, and I am proud to call him a friend.

I am abundantly aware of the list of parliamentarians who have come before me, representing the constituency of Ogmores in all its forms since 1918. I am conscious, too, of the long-standing trust that the electors in the constituency have placed in the Labour party—a trust secured only by Members working for constituents, and ensuring that Labour stands up for the many communities in Ogmores. That is something that I am determined to continue. In the hope of no more by-elections, I look forward to marking the centenary of Labour representation in Ogmores in 2018, as, to my knowledge, I do not plan to go anywhere.

One of my predecessors, Sir Raymond Powell, served the people of Ogmores for more than 20 years and championed many local and national causes. He and I have a mutual skill. Many longer-serving Members have been keen to share stories of Sir Raymond's skills during his time in the Whips Office, but I have yet to discover whether I have such abilities. We are, in fact, both trained in butchery: Sir Raymond was a master butcher, and I was a butchery assistant. I am not sure whether my skill with a knife will be of use in the House, but I am told by Members that it is a useful skill to have. I assume, of course, that that is meant metaphorically.

The diverse communities that make up Ogmores are rich in character, with proud histories and, I believe, bright futures. It is a landlocked community, with many

former mining villages and towns which have shaped the rich histories of the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmores valleys, as well as the communities of Evanstown and Gilfach Goch. To the south are the picturesque villages of Blackmill, Llangeinor and Coytrahen, before we reach the town of Pencoed and the busy communities of Aberkenfig, Sarn, Cefn Cribwr and Tondy. In the east of the constituency, the distinct communities of Llanharan, Brynna and Llanharri, although former villages, are growing apace, but their sense of community remains. In Llanharan, archery is taught, with sportsmen and women competing at a national level.

I am pleased to say that, as many of the villages and towns across the constituency—as well as the physical landscape—have recovered from the heavy industries that once dominated many of them, the rich culture of music, sport, entertainment and proud history has continued, and grows year on year. The cultural capital of Ogmores, Maesteg, boasts some of the greatest names in the entertainment industry who have performed there—as well being able to lay claim to being the ancestral home of none other than Kylie Minogue. It would be remiss of me not to mention the annual Maesteg festival, which opened at the end of last week. I look forward to enjoying the rich musical mix of opera, choirs, theatre productions and various events for young people over the coming weeks. Music and its history are deeply rooted in Ogmores, with the world-famous “Calon Lân” having been written in Blaengarw in the Garw valley and the tradition of male voice choirs continuing to play a significant part in community life. For example, the Ogmores Vale male voice choir, based in Ogmores Vale, entertains thousands with performances across Wales and beyond. As is traditional for the newly elected MP for Ogmores, I am looking forward to entertaining—I use the word loosely—members of the choir with a song of their choice at a choir rehearsal. I can safely say that I have not been blessed with the ability to sing that so many of my fellow countrymen and women possess, so that will be a one-night-only performance.

Like many who live in Ogmores, I am deeply proud of its history and culture. I also see a positive future for the constituency in the years ahead. Nestled within the villages and towns are industries that are thriving. Many Members will be unaware that if they are ever in need of a parachute, including those on an ejector seat, the odds are that it will have been manufactured in the village of Llangeinor. As specialist industries go, you might think that parachute production was something of a niche industry, but Ogmores boasts many such industries, as well as technological hubs such as the UK base of Sony in Pencoed, allowing talented designers to reach their full potential, including in the development of video games and the training of young people in the use of coding, which is something that is still completely beyond me.

The village of Heol-y-Cyw is home to the Rockwool factory. It constructs insulation made from stone, which can be found in many structures across the UK, and it employs hundreds of people directly and over 1,000 in tributary industries. Of course, many of my constituents work either directly at the steelworks in Port Talbot or in connected occupations, and their potential closure is of significant concern. I will do my utmost to keep the pressure on the Government to ensure that a long-term

plan is secured for the steel industry not just in Wales but across the United Kingdom, and I shall work with fellow Members to achieve that. My constituency has already faced the realities of an industry ending, and the legacy that that creates, and we cannot allow that to happen again.

The European Union has played a significant part in the funding of many projects that have been delivered across my constituency, including through the much needed European social fund moneys used to train and reskill young people and to deliver employment schemes such as the successful Jobs Growth Wales initiative delivered by the Welsh Labour Government. I am a proud member of the GMB and Unison trade unions, and workers' rights are close to my heart. One of the reasons that I am proud to be campaigning to vote to remain in the EU in the coming referendum is the fact that many of the improved workers' rights that benefit the people of Ogmore, Wales and the United Kingdom are a direct consequence of the UK's membership of the EU and the work of the trade unions, which I am proud to support.

I would like to close by thanking the many Labour party members who campaigned for me during the recent election. I am exceedingly grateful for the support that they have shown me in recent months. I would also like to pay tribute to my parents for their support and to offer them an apology for the turbulence of having a son who works in politics. Finally, I would like publicly to thank my partner, Bridie, who has tolerated my career choice in recent years. I hope I live up to their expectations. I look forward to making further contributions in the House in the months and years ahead, and to ensuring that the people of Ogmore are always my first priority.

4.38 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), who has entertained the House with a truly exceptional maiden speech. He spoke about his constituency with eloquence and about his predecessors with wit. Many of us remember his distinguished predecessor, Sir Raymond Powell. Indeed, I served in the Government Whips office opposite him and I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that he was a distinguished butcher. The hon. Gentleman will discover, I hope, that his expectation of working with people across the House will be fulfilled. He will find that we on this side are the opposition and not the enemy, and I personally look forward to working with him. It is perfectly clear from his maiden speech that he will fulfil his expectations, just as his partner and his constituents would wish him to do.

The Queen's Speech that we are discussing today is an authentic one nation speech. Social mobility is at its heart, and it makes clear the importance of capitalism working for everyone. It also puts some flesh on the bones of Prime Minister's speech at last year's party conference, which was one of the finest that he has made.

For the moment, Europe dominates our politics. Indeed, at midday on 11 June, Sutton Coldfield town hall will hold a debate between the noble Lords Heseltine and Ashdown on the one side and Nigel Farage and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart)

on the other. I can tell the House that tickets for that great debate sold out faster than Glastonbury and all went within half an hour yesterday.

I want to make just a few brief points in the time available. I want a much greater focus in this parliamentary session on the importance of building new homes. It is virtually impossible for young people today to get on to the housing ladder in the way that my generation did, and dreams of a property-owning democracy are receding. However, homes must be built in the right places. Sutton Coldfield would suffer from the proposals of Birmingham's Labour council to build no fewer than 6,000 new homes in the green belt. That is completely unacceptable, and we look to the Government to call that in at an early stage.

I propose three ideas for how we can make the house-building process easier. First, there must be more imaginative and considered inner-city developments, with more power for local communities and less for developers. Secondly, there must be more incentives to decontaminate land, which would have a huge effect on the availability of land for house building in Birmingham. Finally, I want a real effort to be made to bring to fruition the plans to build a garden city in the black country that could provide up to 45,000 homes, none of which would need to be built on the green belt.

This Queen's Speech debate takes place against the background of an agonisingly difficult but ultimately catastrophic situation in the middle east. The four horsemen of the apocalypse continue to ride through what was Syria—a second-world country. I remind the House that in a country of just over 20 million, 11 million souls are now on the move—6 million within the country and 5 million outside. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) and I have produced a report under our joint chairmanship of the all-party political group on Friends of Syria, which benefits from considerable expert advice and input. Clare Short and I recently visited the Turkey-Syria border with some brilliant British Muslim charities, and I pay tribute to their bravery.

We must ensure that every child in a refugee camp and all those refugee children in Jordan and in Lebanon get an education, which should be paid for by rich European countries. Lebanon and Jordan are swamped by the number of refugees using their public services, and we must help out.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** On that point, it is perhaps worth reminding the House that if the UK took an equivalent percentage of people, 17 million people would be coming into the United Kingdom.

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

We must also keep refugees and migrants as close as possible to the areas from which they came. Few if any of these people want to recreate Syria in Europe; they want to return to the homes from which they were driven, often under gunfire.

The EU must cancel all tariffs on goods from Lebanon and Jordan. Industrial and agricultural goods are still subject to tariffs in some cases. No progress has been made on the EU's 2011 proposal to have deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those areas. We also need to encourage the international community to look ahead to the reconstruction of Syria. The Prime Minister has already made it clear that Britain will

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provide up to a billion pounds of support for reconstruction, which we must ensure happens as swiftly as possible. For how much longer will the international community tolerate the deliberate targeting of hospitals by Russian military aircraft, which have now hit more than 30 hospitals in Syria? Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, but its shocking behaviour is an affront to international order and is almost certainly a war crime.

Finally, I want strongly to support what was said about human rights, and about the two key pieces of legislation in that respect in the Queen's Speech, by the former Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). Let me just make it clear that ISIL will be relatively easily defeated militarily, but 90% of any defeat will be an ideological defeat, and that will be very much more difficult to achieve. We must show the same abhorrence of Islamophobia as we show of anti-Semitism.

4.45 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Lab): May I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) on an excellent maiden speech? I am sure that Members from all parts of the House would agree that it was a great way for him to start his parliamentary career.

I want to focus my remarks on the Bus Services Bill, which includes measures that are welcome and have long been argued for by political leaders in Greater Manchester. However, the Bill also contains serious weaknesses that expose how this Tory Government's belief in "private good, public bad" acts against the public interest and highlights the need for a fair, not flawed, devolution deal. I will expand on that later. It is frankly a scandal that successive Governments, including the last Labour Government, failed to give us the same powers to regulate bus services as there are in London; for decades, the people of Greater Manchester have been denied the right to have a fully integrated public transport system because of free market ideology and vested interests. Of course, we are very proud of our Metrolink light rail system in Greater Manchester, which was developed as a result of the vision of local council leaders, often in the face of opposition from the Department for Transport. But the financial arrangements that have made that possible are also flawed, with the result being excessive fares, too many areas still without a service and a high debt burden.

The people of Greater Manchester want and deserve a world-class public transport system that is accessible, reliable and affordable. That is essential for not only jobs and growth, but our environment and quality of life. Congestion is a scourge of everyday life, with traffic jams, tailbacks and unacceptable delays the norm for motorists, especially during the rush hour. Our unregulated bus services and inadequate tram and train network do not offer a viable or attractive option for too many people. Although the new powers are welcome, we also need a new transport fund on a par with that in London, so that we, too, can offer subsidised services to communities that do not have adequate connectivity, develop orbital

schemes around Greater Manchester and enhance access to local hospitals. We should not be penalised for rejecting congestion charging—that was and is the settled democratic will of the people of Greater Manchester.

I believe five radical changes are necessary: a price freeze for bus and Metrolink fares at least until 2020; the development of a Transport for Greater Manchester connect card and smart ticketing system, so that all tickets can be used on buses, trams and local trains; a new transport fund on a par with that for London to support non-profitable routes for isolated communities, deliver easier access to hospital appointments and prioritise new orbital routes around Greater Manchester; reduced fares for young people, to support travel to study, apprenticeships and work; and a publicly owned, publicly controlled Greater Manchester bus company that could bid for some or all franchises. That fifth change is prohibited by the Bill, which is why I am today urging the Labour Front-Bench team to move amendments to remove this prohibition. If that proves unsuccessful, I will work with colleagues in Greater Manchester to explore the possibility of developing a not-for-profit, co-operative organisation as an alternative.

I believe the vast majority of people feel we should have a publicly owned, publicly controlled public transport system. Public transport should be operated for the public good and in the public interest. Real devolution would allow Greater Manchester to choose our own system. That is why Labour must seek to amend this Bill. If that proves unsuccessful, we in Greater Manchester should explore the not-for-profit, co-operative option.

4.49 pm

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): As one of those who helped to secure the EU referendum in the last Parliament, in opposition at the time to the leaderships of political parties across the House, I very much welcome the EU referendum. It represents a seminal moment in our history. It allows us the opportunity to lance the boil of our strained relationship with the EU. If we vote to remain, we need to roll up our sleeves and make the EU work better for us all. If we vote to leave, I suggest that we need to maximise the potential of what is before us.

It is also a seminal point in another respect: the result will tell us much about how we see ourselves and our place in the world. Do we have the confidence to seek a better future outside the EU? I take issue with the view of Opposition Front Benchers that we see ourselves as lacking in confidence—a 7-stone weakling being kicked about on the beach. I take quite the opposite view: we are a confident nation. I happen to believe that we could do so much better if we left the EU. That contradicts, in many respects, the view of the remain camp.

**Mr MacNeil:** The Eurosceptic side really fear a federal Europe, whereas from our perspective, a federal Britain would be a massive step forward. That shows the disparity between the British Union and the European Union, certainly from an SNP perspective.

**Mr Baron:** The one thing I share with the SNP is the view that "Project Fear" was the wrong approach at the last referendum. We should have painted a much more



positive view of the Union. That is my point here. I think that we can paint a very positive picture of what would happen if we left the EU.

I suggest that it is remaining in the EU—an organisation mired in uncompetitiveness, low growth and high unemployment, with youth unemployment reaching 50% in some countries—that presents the greater danger. The EU's vaunting project of monetary union has proved to be a disaster. It has forced austerity on countries that really should not have been in that position. Furthermore, its pursuit of fiscal union in defence of the euro bodes ill for the future. Voting in is not a static option.

We have heard the merchants of doom and gloom before. Some may remember that it was broadly the same group of people who predicted absolute disaster if we did not join the euro. The same people are now predicting the very same if we leave. One can go back to those forecasts. The last time the Bank of England predicted a negative economic shock prior to the latest estimate of "Project Fear" was when we were considering leaving the exchange rate mechanism. It transpired that we had a very long period of economic growth following our exit from the ERM. That goes to show that forecasts from the establishment and from great and good bodies are not always up to the mark.

The criticism that is often levelled against us is that we cannot paint a picture of what it would be like if we left the EU. We are told that we have no idea. Of course there will be an element of uncertainty if we leave an organisation like the EU, but we must remember that we are a key player in global diplomacy and security. Britain is a member of more international organisations, including having a permanent seat at the United Nations, than any other country. This is not retrenchment; it is embracing a faster growing world when the EU is becoming increasingly stuck in the global economic slow lane.

In the two minutes that remain, let me paint very briefly the picture that I see of what would happen if we were to leave. We would be able to negotiate trade treaties for ourselves, which we cannot do at the moment. Our hands are tied by the EU, which has to accommodate the special interests of 28 members. That means that British firms and workers are missing out on the benefits of potential trade deals with faster growing parts of the world. There are myriad trade opportunities for Britain in the wider world, especially with the faster growing economies outside the EU. Leaving the EU would allow us to take advantage of them.

There is concern that there would be a fall-off in trade if we were to leave. Again, that does not stack up. We run a massive trade deficit with the EU. It is in its interest to pursue trade with us. Trade will continue, as it always has. We trade with Europe, not with the EU. Even if the EU did try to cut up rough, the World Trade Organisation, which has teeth, would not allow tariffs above most favoured nation status tariffs. In other words, the 3% tariff with the US would prevail—and we could lose that in a week or less in a currency swing.

I suggest there would be greater prosperity. Small and medium-sized enterprises are bound to apply EU regulations, but only 5% of businesses actually export to the EU. How many more people could they employ if they were freed from the dead weight of irrelevant EU regulations?

On immigration, we pursue a discriminatory policy at the moment: we say no to the rest of the world, but yes to the EU. That is not fair. The Australians have a points system. Let us treat everybody fairly, and let us benefit from the skills around the world. However, we cannot do that at the moment.

Then there is the £10 billion that we could spend if we left the EU—that is, the difference between the £19 billion we send to the EU and the £9 billion that comes back by way of various grants. We would be £10 billion up. What could we spend that on? Many things.

This also comes down to sovereignty. However, to conclude, I would say that we put a mirror up to ourselves when we vote on 23 June. Let us get out.

4.55 pm

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): There were a number of things I wanted to say, but time is limited. However, there are one or two omissions from the Queen's Speech. Members will recall the debates we have had over the last few months about women's pensions, and I thought there would be something in the Queen's Speech to start to address the anomaly on that issue. As many Members in this Chamber know, some women feel they are being discriminated against, and the Queen's Speech should have addressed that.

A campaign is also going on at the moment over the cuts to pharmacies in the national health service budget. Those cuts could result in some local pharmacies closing—so much for the Government talking about local democracy and involving local people. There is also the issue of student nurses and their bursaries. The bulk of student nurses are women—again, it appears that women are being discriminated against.

On the European situation, I was one of those who campaigned against going into Europe in 1975. I did that for a lot of good reasons. At the time, most people in the labour movement saw Europe as a market that had no benefits—certainly for the trade union movement. We had campaigns across Coventry. Trade union leaders came to Coventry and said, "If you go in, you won't get out." Then, of course, we had the Delors speech about social justice and social policies being introduced in Europe. That changed the attitude of the labour movement and the Labour party.

If we were going to have a referendum, we should have had one when we talked about the single market. As everybody knows, if there is a single market, there is a single bank and a single currency, whichever way we argue it. The Government at the time said they were going to change the agricultural policy, but, unfortunately, they did not do that. They signed us up to the single market, and they boasted about the rebate they got. It was a very interesting scenario. There was another occasion when we should have had a referendum—in fact, there was a chance of one—and that was Maastricht. I welcome the fact that we are now having a referendum, but we can see that there have been lost opportunities.

Like a number of people, I have changed my mind, and I have explained why before, but let me give an example of why. Nissan was interested in investing in Coventry; it was going to locate its car plant there. However, when it discovered that there was no regional aid and no leverage into Europe at that time, it located in Sunderland. I wish the people in Sunderland well,

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because Nissan has done well there. That is a good example of how people can change their minds when they are faced with the realities.

One reason that a lot of people—particularly some in the Conservative party, but not all—want to pull out of Europe is red tape. However, when we ask them to try to define it, the only thing they can come up with is health and safety or labour relations; they do not come up with any other reasons. In fact, the Leader of the House gave the game away about a month ago in a television interview, when he was pointedly asked, “What do you mean by red tape?” He blurted out, “Health and safety.” This is one of the reasons why we should certainly remain in Europe. It has been suggested that the world will be lovely outside Europe. However, people who argue that tariffs in the United States would be only 3% are wrong. We would find that when we traded with the United States, and particularly with the South American market, we paid a higher tariff. Equally, we would pay higher tariffs outside Europe but be expected to conform to the rules and regulations of Europe. These are the hard facts of life.

With the referendum only one month away, I support the right of people in Coventry to have their say, as I have indicated, but must clearly highlight the fact that the hard-won rights of the workplace are at risk—paid leave, for example. Anti-discrimination laws, jobs growth and our place in the world are at stake. We have two universities in my constituency that rely heavily on EU membership. European academics, scientists, technicians and students all play a leading part in Coventry.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

5 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): It is a pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) on taking his seat, and to endorse the tribute he paid to his predecessor. Huw Irranca-Davies is living proof of the fact that one can be a genuinely nice guy and still succeed in politics, and we will miss him.

Members of Select Committees are as divided as any other groups on the question of membership of the European Union, and so it should go without saying that in my remarks on this subject today I am speaking solely for myself. My concern is that the fixation of the European Union on creating a single European defence and foreign policy may make future conflict more likely rather than less. So why has NATO proved to be the most successful military alliance in history? The answer is clear: it is the deterrent effect of United States membership. Taken together with article 5 of the NATO charter, according to which an attack on any member country will be considered an attack on them all, this means that any would-be aggressor must face the prospect of war with the world’s most powerful state, the United States, right from the outset. If Germany had faced that prospect in 1914, not 1917, or in 1939, not late 1941, who knows but that those wars might not have begun, and all that suffering might have been avoided?

In order reliably to deter, collective security must combine adequate power with the virtual certainty that it will be brought into action if triggered by an act of

aggression. On both grounds, NATO succeeds, and the European Union fails, as a collective security organisation. Since the US does not belong to the EU, the latter can muster only a fraction of NATO’s deterrent military power. Nor can there be any certainty that the US will respond to an attack involving EU member states outside the north Atlantic alliance. By trying to create its own foreign policy and its own military forces—which on typical European levels of defence investment will remain modest indefinitely—the EU risks reverting to the uncertainties of the pre-NATO era. The NATO guarantee is a solemn commitment to be willing to start world war three on behalf of a member country facing attack or invasion. NATO membership must not be proffered lightly nor extended to countries on behalf of which article 5 of its charter is simply not credible. Where security is concerned, it is dangerous folly to give promises and guarantees that we are in no position to fulfil, and the EU needs to be particularly careful in pursuing a foreign policy that gives promises of that sort.

In terms of deterring an external threat, the EU adds nothing to the exemplary role discharged by NATO. As for the threat of EU members attacking each other, there is certainly no risk of their going to war once again with each other as long as they remain free, democratic and constitutional. That is because constitutional democracies do not attack one another; instead, wars break out between dictatorships and other dictatorships, or between dictatorships and democracies.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Is it not absurd to suggest that peace in Europe might be destabilised by the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU? The fact is that before we became a member in 1973, Europe had managed for 28 years not to go to war with itself.

**Dr Lewis:** Indeed, and my hon. Friend anticipates a point I was just about to make. Looking at the internal threat, one sees not the slightest chance of members of the EU going to war with each other as long as they remain democratic and constitutional, but if they lose that element of popular democracy in their constitutions, all bets are off.

We heard warnings today about the rise of the far right in some EU member countries. Why is the far right—the extreme anti-immigration right—on the rise? It is on the rise because people feel that they are being disfranchised to some extent and the fate of their country is being decided instead by people whom they did not elect to power and whom they cannot remove. By trying to build a supranational state in Europe in the absence of a democratic mandate, the EU runs the risk of sowing the seeds of precisely the sort of conflict it seeks to abolish.

I know that in this Chamber today more voices have been raised in favour of remain than of leave, but I am not disheartened because I know that all those people campaigning to leave are out there, at the grassroots level, ensuring that when independence day comes on 23 June, the right decision will be taken by the majority of the British people.

5.7 pm

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I am always reluctant to disagree with the Chairman of the Defence Committee, and on this occasion I could not agree with

him more profoundly. I do agree that our defence and security policies must embody the values that they are established to defend. There is no trade-off to be made between security and the values and principles on which a free and open political society is based. On that, we can agree. I think we can agree too that only a defence policy governed by rules established in laws will retain integrity and credibility in the fluid and fickle world of international relations in which we are now mired.

I was disappointed that an opportunity was missed in the Queen's Speech to provide clarity, particularly on the legal consequences of the Government's new policy on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, especially given that in September last year the Prime Minister announced that a UAV had been used for the targeted killing outside armed conflict of a British citizen who had been fighting for Daesh. Since then, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has issued a report calling on the Government to clarify the legal basis for using UAVs in that way. A rebuttal to the Joint Committee's findings was rushed out by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and his colleague Sean Aughey, which criticised aspects of the legal analysis and accused the Committee of adopting "a blunt approach" to the application to drone—I hate that word; UAV—strikes abroad. Clearly opinion is divided, and I feel the opportunity was missed in the Queen's Speech to disperse the fog of law in relation to our defence.

Equally, in the 2015 strategic defence and security review, the Government announced a £178 billion investment in arms and equipment, in part to compensate for the dire budget cuts imposed five years earlier, particularly their cutting of the RAF Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft.

Instead of going to an open contract to replace the Nimrod with a competitive tender, the Government agreed to purchase nine Poseidon P-8 aircraft from the US-based firm Boeing in a deal worth £2 billion. I felt that this was a clear snub to the UK aerospace industry, for which I know Government Members, like me, share a huge respect. The industry employs 80,000 people and contributes £9 billion annually to the UK economy.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Moon:** I will certainly give way to someone who shares my love of the aeronautics industry.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I wholly support what the hon. Lady says about the British defence industry, but I was the Minister at the time involved in the decision on the Nimrod MRA4. It was £750 million over budget, nine years late and still not fit for purpose. I am afraid the project had to be scrapped, but we should have replaced it.

**Mrs Moon:** I totally disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that issue, but I want to move on to the P-8. The MOD has repeatedly evaded all my attempts to obtain information on the P-8 contract. How many UK jobs will be generated by that contract in either manufacturing or support? No answer. Will the P-8 be capable of carrying British torpedoes or sonar buoys? No answer. Standards of ministerial answers to parliamentary questions have deteriorated desperately, and Members of Parliament, constituents and UK business and industry have been left in the dark.

For too long the MOD has used commercial confidentiality to hide the true cost to UK industry and jobs of its single source contracting. The Single Source Regulations Office has revealed that the MOD's use of non-competitive defence procurement represented 53% of the value of new contracts in 2014-15. Approximately £8.3 billion was spent on single source contracts, and this figure is set to rise. How many of those companies are non-UK? How many have included no offset work to UK companies? The House, the public and our defence industries deserve to know.

Finally, I have to raise a campaign I feel passionately about. Again, I am disappointed that it was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. The campaign calls for veterans and reservists to be included in the census. It is essential that we know how many veterans we have and where they are. How are we to put in place an effective response to the community covenant if we do not know how many veterans we have in each of our constituencies?

It is a great pity that the Government reneged on their promise to introduce a war powers Act.

I will work closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) to make sure that Bridgend does not lose valuable jobs, particularly those in the Ford factory, where his constituents and mine work. Ford Bridgend won a bid against Romanian, Spanish and German factories to build the new Dragon engine in Wales. That is what Europe does for us.

5.13 pm

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** I spent 20 years as a human rights lawyer, and for much of that time I represented the Prison Service. I remember when I was young and keen and thought I was at the cutting edge of human rights law. With hindsight, cases came and went and not a lot changed. Human rights law has not of itself reformed prisons, although it did produce a lot of work for lawyers.

What has changed is the spotlight shone on prisons by the leadership shown by the Prime Minister in his speech in February—incidentally, the first speech by a Prime Minister on prisons in my working lifetime—the reforming zeal of the Secretary of State, the family-centred focus of the prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), and the determination of the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice that women prisoners and their children should not be left behind. The Department is showing bravery in getting rid of barriers both physical, in the form of old prisons, and structural, such as the surely now outdated idea of categorisation. The vision is a compassionate one, but it is founded on sound Conservative principles. Prisoners are our neighbours. It is to our communities that they return on release and in which about half of them reoffend during their first year out of prison. It is in all of our interests that we deal with this issue. It is too expensive, both financially and emotionally, to throw away the key.

Is this the moment for those of us who care about prison reform to break out the hooch? Sadly not. There is no doubt that prisons are more dangerous places today than they have been for many years. The Justice Committee, on which I am honoured to serve, recently published a report that makes clear the extent of the problem: assaults are up by 20%; suicides and

[Victoria Prentis]

murders are up substantially; and the number of arson attacks—think how frightening a fire is in prison—is up by 57%.

The Secretary of State's response to our report was characteristically robust: he acknowledges the extent of the problem and has found extra money to deal with aspects of it. He will ensure that, in future, the figures we really need to measure progress—such as the number of hours spent out of a cell during the day—are made available to us.

There are two major obstacles to reform. First, as identified by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the numbers of those imprisoned are impeding progress. Too many inmates and too few staff mean that limited time can be given to supervision, and even delivering a prisoner to a classroom door is often too difficult. Prisoners are put in cells with people who have the same extremist views or who are from the same gang, which might make their management easier but does nothing for their rehabilitation.

Having more prison officers will help, but they will have to be good ones. The Ministry of Justice is doing its best, and there has been a net increase of 530 officers since the last recruitment push. Experienced staff take years of training, however, and greater efforts must be made to retain them.

What would really help is a push on diversion from prison. The sad, rather than the merely bad, and the vast majority of women and young adults coming up for sentence should never go through the prison gates. A judicial working group is looking at models of problem-solving courts, where contact between a judge and those they sentence is regular, and multiple organisations work together on rehabilitation. Trials of those courts must go ahead as soon as possible. The Justice Committee saw some excellent examples when we visited the States recently. They are not easy options for offenders; it is much harder to give up substance abuse or a pattern of behaviour than to spend time in a cell. Restorative justice may have a role to play, and release on temporary licence certainly does.

The second major obstacle to reform is the exponential increase in the use of new psychoactive substances, which make an already difficult cohort of prisoners almost impossible to manage. This stuff should not be confused with cannabis. I was recently told about an incident where a prisoner had been smoking spice. He became violent and four officers went into the cell to help. All four of them had to be hospitalised because of secondary inhalation. These drugs are dangerous and addictive and they induce psychosis. They have, sadly, become the currency of choice in prisons. The criminalisation of their possession, which comes into force this week, will help, but real resources need to be put into using our world-leading testing techniques and searching everyone often, if we are serious about holding back the tidal wave of these drugs.

In summary, the Government's reforming policies are brave and desperately needed.

5.18 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I rise to address the issue of human rights. I am not as reassured as the right hon. and learned Member for

Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is by the Queen's Speech, because it is still the Government's avowed intention to introduce what they call a British Bill of Rights and to reform human rights law, and there has been no undertaking that the Human Rights Act will not be repealed. However, I have some good news for those in the House who wish to save the Human Rights Act: it is not possible for this Parliament to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights without the consent of the Scottish Parliament, and, given the make-up of the present Scottish Parliament, there is absolutely no question of that consent being granted.

Two years ago, during the independence referendum, the Prime Minister invited Scotland not to leave but to lead the United Kingdom. Perhaps he should be careful what he wishes for in future, because, given the nature of the devolved settlement, the Scottish Parliament will now be in a position to lead the United Kingdom by saving the Human Rights Act for the whole of the UK.

**Mr MacNeil:** Although we in the SNP can perhaps claim credit for saving the Human Rights Act, the Conservatives should not be shy of taking some pride from its authorship. Indeed, a Conservative MP, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, was one of the lead drafters of the European convention on human rights. He did so having been a Nuremberg prosecutor, and as a response to the rise of communism in eastern Europe. The Conservatives had a lot to do with that safety mechanism for the citizen, and it ill behoves them to try to change it.

**Joanna Cherry:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. To move to more modern times, when the Human Rights Act was passed by a Labour Government in 1998, it was intended to be a floor rather than a ceiling for human rights across the United Kingdom. The devolved Parliaments can go further if they so choose, and in Scotland we have chosen to do that, so complying with the European convention is not the limit of our ambitions. In fact, I would say that a key challenge for progressive Governments is to find ways not to avoid human rights responsibilities but to embed human rights across different areas of social policy.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): We have previously heard in this House the argument that we should not turn our backs on Saudi Arabia. For clarification, we are calling for an arms embargo, not a trade embargo, but we must ensure that we never place more importance on trade than we do on human rights. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that we are all hoping Saudi Arabia is not too proud to heed such opinions and to move forward into the 21st century on human rights?

**Joanna Cherry:** Yes, I agree entirely. I was very pleased to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) remind all of us across the House that the signal the British Government are sending out by indicating that they want to repeal the Human Rights Act and possibly even leave the convention is having an adverse impact across Europe, particularly in Russia. If we want to hold other countries in the world to high standards, we must espouse the same high standards rather than water them down.

Embarking on a course of so-called reform is never a very good idea unless we have a good idea about what we want to do and why we want to do it. Since the UK Government announced that they intended to bring forward a Bill of Rights in the Queen's Speech last year, we have seen a great deal of confusion in the Government about what they want to do. The Justice Secretary has appeared before parliamentary Committees several times to try to explain why they are pursuing a path of so-called reform of the Human Rights Act: sometimes his position seems to be informed by his Euroscepticism; sometimes he talks of giving powers to British judges rather than to European ones; and sometimes he says that we only need to tweak the Human Rights Act. Both he and his junior Minister, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), whom I see on the Front Bench, have told us that they wish to stay in the European convention on human rights, but the Home Secretary recently gave a speech in which, according to my reading, she was pretty clear that she thought we should leave it.

I suggest that this confusion and lack of clarity do not bode well for the Government's plans on human rights, but the Scottish Parliament will be happy to ride to the rescue. In all three separate devolution arrangements, the Human Rights Act is a matter reserved for the Westminster Government, but human rights themselves are not so reserved. Members will search in vain for human rights in the schedule of reserved matters to the Scotland Act 1998, because they are not reserved. If this Parliament wants to legislate in the field of human rights, it will be required to obtain the consent of the Scottish Parliament.

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has made it very clear that there is absolutely no question of such consent being given. The reason consent would have to be given is the Sewel convention, which has now found statutory form in section 2 of the new Scotland Act 2016. On 11 November 2014, the Scottish Parliament, as then constituted, voted by 100 votes to 10 in favour of a motion supporting the Human Rights Act and expressing confidence in it.

I believe that the Northern Ireland Assembly passed a similar vote of confidence in the Human Rights Act in June 2015. It recognised the "vital importance" of the Act to the Good Friday agreement, which we should never overlook. The National Assembly for Wales also passed a motion with overwhelming support in November, stating that

"we oppose any attempt to repeal the Human Rights Act".

I believe that the Welsh First Minister has argued that scrapping it would make the UK

"look like a banana republic."

I could not have put it better myself.

Since the Scottish Parliament last gave its overwhelming backing to the Human Rights Act, there has been an election in Scotland, which was won by the Scottish National party. The fact remains that in the new Scottish Parliament the parties that support the Human Rights Act far outweigh those that do not, but we are not sure of the position of the Scottish Conservatives. Their leader, Ruth Davidson, recently gave an interview to the *Pink News*, a paper dear to my heart and hers, in which she said she opposed the Home Secretary's plans to withdraw from the European convention on human rights. However, Ruth Davidson has as yet been silent on the repeal of the Act.

During the election in Scotland the Scottish Tories took great care to distance themselves from this Government—they did not even mention the Conservative party on their leaflets. But Ruth Davidson will not be able to duck the issue forever: my colleague Ben Macpherson, the new SNP MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith, has lodged a parliamentary motion in the Scottish Parliament calling on all MSPs to make it clear that the new Scottish Parliament will refuse consent to repeal the Human Rights Act. It is time for the Ruth Davidson party to get off the fence. But even if she ends up siding with her colleagues here—as she usually does, when push comes to shove—the overwhelming majority of Members of Scottish Parliament want to keep the Human Rights Act and will keep it for the whole United Kingdom.

5.26 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): The good news is that the Scottish Tories doubled their representation in the Scottish Parliament. The Tories are coming, so the SNP had better watch out—the only non-socialist party in Scotland is on the march.

Some have said that this Queen's Speech is a bit thin. I personally take the view that it is much better that the Government limit their activities and do less but do it well, rather than trying to rush through a whole load of ill-thought-out measures. I particularly welcome the proposal to give local authorities the power to retain their business rates, and the Investigatory Powers Bill.

I also very much support what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) said about prisons. The hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) and I served as prison officers in Dartmoor for three days, as a consequence of which I changed my view. I used to be a "lock 'em up and throw away the key" man, but then I found that we were spending £25,000 per prisoner a year on just locking up people who learn nothing. That is wrong, and this Government are absolutely right to try to bring education into our prisons.

In the short time available to me I will concentrate on four issues: the proposal to speed up the adoption process, the introduction of further measures to prevent radicalisation, defence and, inevitably, Europe. I welcome the adoption measures in principle, and understand that social services are caught between a rock and a hard place. But I have myself witnessed Surrey County Council's behaviour in respect of two young people in my constituency. The council had made up its mind to remove the children from a couple. Each was represented by a different law firm, whose narrow interest was alleged to be the individual client and not the couple. I was threatened with contempt proceedings for having had the temerity to intervene on behalf of my constituents, and the social worker wrote that for the parents to provide good care was not "good enough". If half the energy expended by Surrey Council on removing those children from their parents had been invested in helping them, the outcome might have been better all round. I am encouraged by my conversation with the Minister for Children and Families earlier this afternoon. I think he understands the problem.

On radicalisation, the principal threat we face is not generic terrorism. We have to be honest about this; the threat is specifically Islamic fundamentalism. That is

[*Sir Gerald Howarth*]

what threatens our country. Young people brought up in Britain and taught in our schools are nevertheless being indoctrinated by Islamic fundamentalists and persuaded to engage in acts of medieval barbarity, in the name of Islam, beyond the understanding of the British people. The principal onus to root out that evil must therefore rest on the Muslim community. I will wait to see what the Government produce in the way of legislation before making a final judgment. The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) set out some of the challenges that the Government will face in defining extremism.

Earlier this year, the Government mooted a proposal that any group that met in an out-of-school setting for more than six hours a week should have to register with Ofsted. Although it is vital that the Government take action against those people who wish to do harm to our society, regulating groups such as Sunday schools is clearly absurd. It would place a huge administrative burden on such groups, would severely damage volunteering and would be a serious infringement of personal liberty and freedom of association. Furthermore, any such extremist groups simply would not register, or, given the arbitrary nature of a six-hour figure, would divide their teaching into two three-hour groups a week. This is unworkable and a danger to our freedoms.

On the wider issue, it would be perverse in the extreme if, in order to manage extremist Muslims who are bent on our destruction and whom we have allowed to settle in the country, the Government were to impose severe restrictions on those practising the state religion of Christianity, which espouses turning the other cheek and love for thy neighbour. I believe that Christian society here is under threat. It was reported in the paper today that only 52% of people regard themselves as Christian, and we are in danger of creating a vacuum that will be filled by others.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** I have never been able to document this, but I remember my father telling me—coming as we do from a Jewish background—that when Polish émigrés who settled here at the end of the second world war began, in certain enclaves, to bring some of the anti-Semitic traditions from their homeland of the past to our homeland of the present, the Labour Government of the day made a very firm statement about that. There was nothing discriminatory about focusing on that particular problem; we must focus on the problem where the totalitarian doctrine is being applied.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I am grateful, as ever, to my right hon. Friend.

I raised with the Foreign Secretary the issue of how the Government calculate defence expenditure, and I entirely accept that that expenditure fits with NATO guidelines. However, we have only met that 2% target by shifting money from other Departments into defence, which I do not think is the way to proceed. I hope that we will see a real increase in defence expenditure in the coming years, so that we can proceed with the Type 26 global combat ship—our new frigates—for which I had some responsibility in the Department. I welcome the renewal of the deterrent, as will my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), but let us get on with it.

On Europe, in their determination to frighten the public, the Government and their “remain” friends stand accused of talking down the British economy. If leaving would produce such dire outcomes, why on earth are we holding a referendum at all? Why did the Prime Minister readily acknowledge that Britain can survive outside the EU? What has changed? We prospered well enough in the glorious 1950s under the Macmillan Conservative Government—“you’ve never had it so good”—and people were able to move around the continent for work, as my father did in the mid-1950s, when he weekly commuted to Hamburg where he established the Johnson Wax company in Germany. These fears are being raised deliberately to frighten the British people. We should have confidence in our ability to exit the EU, and head for the sunlit uplands where we can prosper as an independent nation on our own.

5.32 pm

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It might have been better for the current EU debate if the Government had taken some time to sketch out the vision for Europe of those Tories who are committed to remaining in the EU, but I guess that could not happen because this is a cobbled together programme—a coalition Queen’s Speech of pro and anti-European Tories, and those who are pro and anti the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said that economic security always comes first, which is obviously why he has plunged us into a referendum, with the Government tearing itself apart while he is running around the country telling anyone who will listen about the catastrophic economic consequences of leaving. This is an “on balance” decision and choice between two visions. One is where we blame other Europeans for all our ills, conjure up an image of a return to an idyllic 1950s, and have to accept—without evidence—that alone we can be a land of milk and honey. Then there is the reality for our car industry, our food and drink manufacturers, and science and innovation budgets, and a future where our economic prosperity is intrinsically linked to our membership of the European Union. I have come to the conclusion that the interests of our children and grandchildren lie in being part of that successful trading bloc, and that that is also the best way to guarantee many other rights and freedoms.

However, it does not have to be an inflexible Union that is blind to new concerns. It needs more democracy and a better balance between the interests of the domestic state and the wider Union. A significant influx of people into parts of this country can put a strain on school places and other services. The solution is a European migration fund, so that those areas receive additional funding to help them cope with added pressures.

On the proposed Bill of Rights, it is hard not to see yet another measure to appease the Prime Minister’s enemies. We already have the Human Rights Act 1998, based on a convention drawn up by British lawyers and adjudicated on in our courts. What rights do we currently have that the Government want us to lose? If there is to be a focus on human rights, what about a bit more respect for the rights of disabled people? What about a measure that acknowledges the unfair assessment arrangements currently depriving them of the payments they rightly deserve and the lack of legal aid to challenge those decisions at tribunals? What about some action to address the rights of those being denied access to fertility

services because of the bungled reorganisation of the NHS? Why are there no national standards for IVF in England and Wales? Why do Ministers stand by while clinical commissioning groups exclude couples on the basis of invented moral criteria and ignore National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on IVF treatment? What about the human rights of those couples? What about the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign? What about their rights? How about a signal from the Government that they are going to right that wrong?

The Children and Social Work Bill is another mish-mash of what now passes for Tory policy. We see some welcome measures, with a promised covenant for care leavers. That ought to be applauded, because this is one group who suffer almost as much from the intervention of the state as they do from the circumstances that led to them being brought into care. They are deprived of education and are more likely to end up in prison or in receipt of psychiatric care. As welcome as the changes are, however, they are accompanied by changes to the regulation and training of social workers. How many attempts will the Government need before they think they have got this right? We will not get better social work by trying to reduce social workers to the status of some kind of functional technicians carrying around a manual of dos and don'ts based on the latest ministerial fantasies. On adoption, of course, we had a definitive piece of legislation last year, but here we are in Foster Care Fortnight back with another bite at the cherry in an effort to make the courts do the Government's bidding.

On the Investigatory Powers Bill, we need a modern framework of power available to the police and security services, but we will not protect our country by turning it into a surveillance state. On the Policing and Crime Bill, why do police and crime commissioners not look at the Crown Prosecution Service as well as police complaints, because that is what many of my constituents are complaining about today?

5.38 pm

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): I am delighted to take advantage of this debate to talk about one of the issues raised in the Gracious Speech: reforms to our prison system. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who spoke so eloquently earlier, I welcome the reforms that will ensure that individuals have an opportunity for a second chance; that give prison governors unprecedented freedom; that ensure that prisoners receive a better education; and that will provide improved mental health care to all individuals in the criminal justice system. Our prison system has long suffered from high numbers of repeat offenders. I firmly believe that if we are to change that, rehabilitation must be improved. We cannot allow offenders to get stuck in a constant cycle of feeling there are few options available to them but to reoffend once they have been released.

I would like to thank the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who is the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. She afforded me the opportunity to be the rapporteur on mental health to the Joint Committee. As part of that role, I have been studying the recent report released by Lord Harris on the self-inflicted death of

prisoners aged 18 to 24. We are seeing a worrying rise in levels of suicide and self-harm in prisons, in particular among young adult males. This is tragic. Prison should be a place of punishment, but we need to care for the mental health of those who cannot look after themselves.

I recently visited a local prison and saw the challenges facing the prison system. Anyone who visits a prison can rest assured it is not a holiday—not a three-meal-a-day place that is free. Sadly, a young man was recently found dead in his cell in the prison I visited. An inquiry found that neglect as a result of systematic failings had contributed to his death, including a lack of access to medical help. This is so sad and raises questions about what more we should be doing to help individuals in these situations.

From my research, I have been shocked by the high levels of violence in the system. Despite all the efforts, a gang culture still operates in prisons, with a hierarchy among those in the system. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), I recognise that part of the problem is the availability of legal highs. Despite efforts by prison wardens, the challenge of preventing these drugs from entering the prison system is proving incredibly difficult. For me, a clear way of tackling the problem is to ensure good, strong leadership in our prisons, so I welcome the creation of reform prisons. Led by governors, these will drive a revolution in education, training, healthcare and security for prisoners.

We must start with the basics and do all we can to change the environment within the prison system. Instead of allowing prisoners to focus on the negatives, let us reverse the cycle and provide them with a positive sense of purpose. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), I think we need improvements in education and careers advice so that prisoners can learn skills that could bring them major opportunities in the future.

The mental state of prisoners can be extremely difficult to manage. For many, the realisation that they will be spending years behind bars is overwhelming. Of course they should not have committed the crime in the first place, but if we can use prison as an opportunity to support them back into playing a positive role in society, surely it must be a good thing.

Today, just one in six people leave prison with an education or training placement. Last year, the Prison Reform Trust issued figures showing that 47% of prisoners had no qualifications. Is it any wonder they reoffend, given the lack of opportunities available to them on their release? It is easy for individuals to get stuck in that cycle when they feel that their opportunities when they are released are extremely limited. If we can break the cycle and provide them with skills that can be readily translated into the workplace outside prison, we can hopefully go a long way to improving an individual's chances of rehabilitation and make it less likely that they will reoffend.

5.42 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The referendum on 23 June will shape this country's future international relationships probably for the rest of the century. Whatever the result, there will be serious consequences. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee produced a report recently that concluded that

[Mike Gapes]

“leaving the EU could result in the UK becoming a ‘smaller’ or less influential international player, especially in the context of increasing pressure from rising powers on the post-1945 global economic and governance frameworks.”

We see those rising powers in Asia. The Americans have just agreed to sell arms to Vietnam. We see massive territorial disputes between China and almost all its neighbours: the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam. The rising powers of Asia, including south-east Asia, believe—rightly—that the global institutions that we did so much to shape in the immediate post-world war two period do not reflect the growing economic importance of other parts of the world. If we were to leave the EU, the British permanent seat on the UN Security Council, currently defended by our 27 EU partners, who see Britain and France as having worked together consistently in the UN system to protect European interests, would no longer be seen as protecting European interests. France will have that role, but we will not.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I was under the impression that the European Union was seeking to take France’s and the UK’s position in the Security Council and act as one, which is not how the hon. Gentleman presented it.

**Mike Gapes:** That impression is wrong. The reality is that there is general acceptance—at this moment, grudgingly in some cases—that the UK and France work collectively and consult their European partners within the UN system. That, however, might well be put in jeopardy if we leave. There would be big question-marks for the future.

We live in a world, as already mentioned in the debate, in which Russia is nationalist and assertive under the Putin regime and that led to the annexation and invasion of other territories—not just Ukraine, but Georgia—along with cyber-warfare against NATO members in the Baltic states. We have seen aircraft either going very close to or entering other countries’ air space and, of course, the buying of political parties, including the Front National in France. Then there is Putin’s propaganda channel, which pumps out every day through Freeview a completely distorted view of what is happening in many countries around the world, without ever referring to internal Russian problems. We see all that today.

Some countries around the world have started to take action on the money laundering and other activities going on from Russia. I hope that the Bills that will come out of this Queen’s Speech will lead to more robust action against the money that is being put into our financial institutions by the kleptocracy in Moscow.

I do not have time to refer to it in detail, but the Home Affairs Select Committee heard evidence from William Browder, of Hermitage Capital Investments, in the early part of this month. This needs to be looked at and studied by Members to understand how Sergei Magnitsky died in very strange circumstances. The United States Congress has, of course, passed the Magnitsky law. Interestingly, human rights was mentioned in this debate. Last week, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives agreed a proposal for a Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act to extend the sanctions against people involved in corrupt

activities to those who abuse human rights globally. That is an interesting concept. If for good reasons we are not prepared or do not wish to stop trade with certain countries, but nevertheless wish to target the individuals who carry out human rights abuses, perhaps we should consider a similar proposal in this Parliament.

Let me highlight one other area in the time left available to me. The European Union provides a democratic vision. The shadow Foreign Secretary referred to the peace and co-operation we have had since the second world war, but we also act as a magnet for those countries coming out of authoritarianism, out of fascism or out of domination under the Warsaw pact. We need to maintain these standards, but if Britain leaves the EU, we will weaken that process in our continent.

5.48 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak about a Queen’s Speech that focuses at its heart on how to improve economic well-being and growth for everyone in the country. What I want to focus on today, however, is the security that we need to establish for this country with respect to events taking place in the world.

Let me start by talking about the international development project, which the Queen’s Speech commits us to once again. It is something that I wholeheartedly support not simply because of the moral obligation I believe we have as the fifth-richest nation in the world to help the poorest nations, but equally because, at the heart of it, is a true Conservative idea in the sense of investing for our own future and gaining from it. We benefit from the advantages of India, which now trades with us: a country into which we have poured much money over the years through the international development budget. Equally and fundamentally, however, there is the question of where the money is going in today’s hotspots around the world—although the term “hotspots” almost undermines the importance of what are areas of real human tragedy. We have put more money into, for instance, the refugee camps around Syria than all the other European nations added together.

We are talking about just 0.7% of income. People say to me, “That £12 billion should be spent on other things. It should be spent on repairing the roads, on improving schools, or on providing more nurses.” While all those items are laudable, I would argue that if we were to say, “That is it: we are going to give in to those demands, and we are not going to spend 0.7% in those areas”, the money would in fact disappear, because it is a percentage of income.

As I said earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), the proportion of people who have gone into refugee camps in Lebanon is the equivalent of 17 million people entering the United Kingdom. I am not saying that 17 million people are coming to the United Kingdom, but that gives some impression of the pressures that that country is under in dealing with such a huge influx of refugees.

It is absolutely right that a country like the United Kingdom is there to support countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The House should be under no illusion: if we withdrew our support from them—along, perhaps, with other countries—they simply would not be able to cope with the refugee crisis that is enveloping



them, and the refugees would go to the next place. They would move across the Mediterranean into central Europe, as, indeed, hundreds of thousands already have.

That is not an argument about the European Union, but between 40% and 50% of our trade is with European countries, and if those economies are struggling because of the influx of refugees, they simply will not have the economic capability to trade with us as they do now. That will inevitably lead to a strain on our own economy and a reduction in our GDP. The 0.7% that we will have saved by not spending the money elsewhere will suddenly become a 0.81% reduction in GDP, so the money will still not exist, and we will have turned our back on the poorest people in the world. We should not do that, because we are a proud nation that stands up and helps.

That, I think, is at the heart of the security aspect of today's debate. It is not just about security at home, but about how the consequences of events throughout the world affect us at home: about how they affect the people in our constituencies. The cost of living and the prices that they pay in our shops are directly related to what is going on in the world. We cannot turn our back on those issues.

In the brief time that I have left, let me simply say this. We know that the Chilcot report will be published on 6 July, and last weekend we read articles in *The Sunday Times* about what might or might not be in it. Mistakes were made with Iraq. Mistakes were made when we went into the war, mistakes were made during the war, and mistakes were made after the war. That is going to be addressed, but we must not allow the report to be the shield behind which we automatically hide when discussing whether to intervene in other areas and other conflicts. The world is a dangerous place.

Mention has been made today of Libya, and of the extent to which the intervention there may have been catastrophic, but let us not forget that Gaddafi was on his way to Benghazi to slaughter those people. The idea that that would not have happened if we had not intervened, and the idea that Daesh would not now be in Benghazi in a state that had been wiped out by Gaddafi's troops—who would then have withdrawn—is fanciful. There is living proof of that in Syria, where we did not intervene. So I hope that after the Chilcot report has been published on 6 July, it will not be used as a shield to prevent us from doing things elsewhere in what is indeed a dangerous world.

5.53 pm

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): Let me say this, Madam Deputy Speaker:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us".

While that may not be a fair analysis of the Queen's Speech, I think that it provides, fairly and appropriately, a synopsis of today's debate. By some, it has been lauded and applauded as a progressive programme for this country during the ensuing year, while for others it has been a huge letdown.

I shall focus my comments on security here at home. There is a bizarre amount of hypersensitivity surrounding the proposed Bill of Rights. It is as though a sacred text was going to be burned on the altar of populism in this

country, but that is not the case. I wish that people would sit back and analyse the proposals and then assess whether they appropriately enshrine the underlying principles of the European convention on human rights. No one is asking that question, however. They are simply saying, "If it's not the Human Rights Act, it's not good enough for us."

Will the proposals build on the European convention on human rights? We do not know, because we have not seen them, but we know from the contents of the Queen's Speech debate that a commitment has been given that the ECHR will underpin all the proposals. In doing this, we should establish the supremacy of this Parliament and of our Supreme Court, as well as underpinning and expanding the principles and foundations from which we have benefitted not just in the past 50 or 60 years but over the centuries going back to the Magna Carta, which was built into the Bill of Rights, which was built into the convention, which was built into the Human Rights Act. If we can build upon those principles in that way, there will be nothing to fear. But let us see the proposals. Let us see what we are to be presented with.

I look forward to scrutinising the criminal finances Bill. Many Members will know that the scourges of terrorism and paramilitarism still exist to this day in Northern Ireland, and that many people are involved in the criminality that funds such terrorism. I remember a prominent paramilitary in my own constituency—as a result of his involvement in such pursuits, he is no longer with us—who used to pay a premium for bookies' dockets to justify the wads of cash that he obtained from his drug dealing. I want to see legislation that will outlaw that kind of money laundering and the pursuit of crime that supports terrorism in our country.

The biggest disappointment of this section of the Queen's Speech is the failure categorically to refuse to introduce proposals on the registration of out-of-school educational settings. I have read with interest the counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill, and the Home Secretary knows my views on the fact that it will not apply to Northern Ireland. Given the extremism that we have faced, that is a missed opportunity. In Westminster Hall, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) proposed that we should use the Disclosure and Barring Service for this purpose. That was a good, appropriate proposal and I am glad to see that it forms part of the Gracious Speech and the Government's plans.

However, I would love to know whether the proposed regime will include an Ofsted appointment and the regulation of out-of-school educational settings. If it will, it will breach the Conservative party's manifesto commitment to reject any sweeping authoritarian measures that would threaten the hard-won freedoms in this country. It would be far too wide and far too shallow, when, in response to extremism, we need a measure that is deep and narrowly focused.

I would like to hear, in response to the debate today, that disaggregation will be considered. We know the fears that an accumulation of six hours could easily be amassed in a church setting—across scouts, Sunday school and going to church itself, alongside other ancillary activities. Will the Government please take the opportunity to rule that out today and to assure us that we will be able to enjoy the hard-won freedoms that we have in the Human Rights Act and in the proposed Bill of Rights, now and in the future?

5.59 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I will not follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) in quoting from a novel because, given what I am about to say, it would have to be “Crime and Punishment”, which might take quite a long time. However, I agree with what he said about the Bill of Rights to the extent that we must have a careful and considered debate on the matter. It is not something that should be rushed. These are important matters, and our international reputation in the field of human rights is a precious thing, as is our reputation for safeguarding the rule of law. It is legitimate to look at how best we can best achieve that in the current context. The Government are doing that in a calm way, and I have complete faith that the Lord Chancellor will take it forward in a considered manner.

I want briefly to touch on my old stamping ground of local government. I welcome the proposals in the Queen’s Speech relating to local government and planning. The proposal for 100% retention of business rates is one for which many of us have long argued. If I may take a modest measure of pride, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) and I were proud when we were Ministers to bring forward partial business rate retention in the Local Government Finance Act 2012. We always thought that it was the first step along the road to 100% retention. The new Bill will put that on the statute book, but we must now look at even further freedoms for local authorities to raise capital against the opportunities for income. Perhaps we might see the development of a large and significant municipal bond market to take infrastructure projects forward. The proposal is welcome.

Reform of planning law is also welcome, but I hope that we carefully consider the extent of reform of the promised compulsory purchase legislation. Practitioners in that field want a thorough and complete updating of the law, and I hope that Ministers will take that on board. A sensible way forward was offered in a Law Commission report from 2003, but it is yet to be put on the statute book.

Prison reform is important to the Justice Committee, which I have the honour of chairing. On previous days and today, several hon. Members touched on our report on prison safety, which highlights the fact that our prisons have got significantly less safe and are now more dangerous. The number of assaults has increased both among prisoners and on staff. Suicides, self-harm and fires have all also increased. That is unsustainable, and it is to the full credit of the Secretary of State for Justice that that was immediately recognised. His response in a letter to our Committee yesterday made no bones about the fact that he regards the figures as terrible and that immediate action must be taken. He has put money where his mouth is by assigning an additional £10 million to prison safety with immediate effect. He is to be commended for that, and I congratulate him on that approach.

However, we need to go further. The prison reform Bill and the concept of reformed prisons will change the legal framework to ensure that work is proper and meaningful and that our prisons have a real sense of rehabilitation and purpose. That is critical, but it will be achieved only if we get the numbers down, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe

(Mr Clarke) said. It is unsustainable to have a prison population of 86,000. Officers are overstretched. Efforts have been made to recruit new staff, but they have in large measure been offset by resignations from the Prison Service, often of experienced staff. The National Offender Management Service needs to get a grip on staff retention.

If prisons are bursting at the seams, purposeful work and serious rehabilitation cannot happen. As anyone who has been involved in the criminal justice system will know—I was a barrister for 30 years—we must deal with the key factors, such as the lack of family ties, of educational attainment, of literacy, of employability and of stable homes. We have to grasp the nettle, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, and say to the more populist press that getting prison numbers down is actually desirable and a good goal from a Conservative perspective, never mind anything else.

The ultimate test of doing good by society is to ensure that there are fewer victims of crime, and if we reduce reoffending, there will be fewer victims. It is now possible to achieve that through better technology, such as tagging, and through much more serious alternatives to custody, such as much more imaginative use of release on temporary licence. All those things are real opportunities, and the prison reform Bill presents a chance to seize them. The Secretary of State has been bold in a good and long tradition of Conservative social reformers, and I wish him well in that process.

6.4 pm

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): If a single phrase could define Whitehall’s ambition for the UK’s place in the world, it might be that the UK should “punch above its weight”. In 2010, the Prime Minister adopted that phrase when introducing that year’s strategic defence review, in which his Government inflicted swingeing manpower and equipment cuts on the armed forces, making sure that Britain’s biggest ever aircraft carriers would be without aircraft for years after entering service and scrapping the Nimrod replacement, ending any pretence that the UK could effectively monitor and respond to activity in its territorial waters. Despite creating such gaps in the UK’s defence capability, the Prime Minister made it clear that the armed forces were still expected to deliver Britain’s punch wherever the Government directed. It is no wonder that five years later, as demonstrated by the Ministry of Defence’s own survey, this Government have presided over a troubling decline in the morale of the armed forces.

The question of whether Britain can, or indeed should, punch above its weight militarily is addressed in just two phrases in Her Majesty’s speech. The first is:

“Ministers will invest in Britain’s armed forces, honouring the military covenant and meeting the NATO commitment to spend 2% of national income on defence.”

The second states:

“They will also act to secure the long-term future of Britain’s nuclear deterrent.”

Yet time and again we learn of decisions that demonstrate how difficult this Government find balancing such competing demands. From its introduction in 1988, the Army’s main armoured personnel carrier, the Warrior, has been known for faulty electrics and problems with its electrically controlled chain gun. However, it was not

until 2009 that Warrior gunners were authorised to use the mechanical safety catch, and in the interim there were an unknown number of undemanded firings and an unknown number of unintended casualties. Surely a Government aspiring to remain a member of the nuclear club, whatever the cost, must provide their front-line troops with a vehicle that is secure and safe to use if they are serious about investing in our armed forces.

Members from across the House participated in a campaign on compensation for service personnel affected by mesothelioma. That campaign was necessary only because of the Government telling victims already diagnosed that their diagnosis had missed an arbitrary cut-off date. Although the Minister involved is to be commended for responding positively, it raises questions about the Government's approach to our armed forces that such a campaign should be necessary. Lately, I have been approached on behalf of RAF squippers who kept their colleagues safe by repairing vital life-saving equipment. There are strong indications that their working conditions have resulted in many of them dying from work-related cancers and chemically induced illnesses. I ask the Government to examine the evidence closely to see whether there is another injustice they should proactively address.

My point in raising these issues is, first, to recognise the unsatisfactory conditions in which our military personnel are too often asked to carry out the work that underpins Britain's punching above its weight and, secondly, to demonstrate that decisions to spend large sums on any military programme are not without consequences. The commitment to Trident contained in the Queen's Speech has profound implications for the rest of the military. In signs of what is to come, there have been yet more budget revisions that will see the true cost of the Trident replacement continuing to spiral out of control, yet the Government continue to talk of a programme that will be carefully managed and subject to value-for-money processes.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the alternative spend on military applications. The recent price tag of £204 billion is being placed on Trident, but the Queen's Speech prioritised new transport methods and an opportunity to connect people on a wider basis. Would not another valuable way of spending some of that money be to invest in mass transit rather than in mass destruction?

**Kirsten Oswald:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is undeniably true that there are many and varied uses that that money could much better be put to.

If the decision is to proceed and the Government are committed to this programme, whatever the cost may be, Trident then becomes the one unstoppable expenditure commitment in the defence budget. Homework was set for all Members by the Minister for Defence Procurement before the recess, as we were all provided with a handout on nuclear weapons, a copy of which I have here, and asked to read it carefully. I did, and it demonstrated clearly to me that this Government are running out of credible arguments. It stated that to be effective, Britain's nuclear weapons system needs to be "invulnerable and undetectable". In this world of technological change,

who can truly believe that that will remain the case for its planned lifetime? Already, we can see the emergence of technologies and detection systems that will make concealment very challenging. I know this House does not like to be reminded of it, but there is one place where it will always be possible to find one or more of these submarines, and that is on the Clyde, just a few miles from Scotland's most densely populated city region. In extremis, if the one submarine that is on patrol is disabled, there is one other place from which the UK's Trident missiles can be fired, and that is from these submarines on the Clyde. The homework factsheet also suggests that the UK could use Trident missiles on countries that may transfer nuclear technology to terrorists. Even to consider the use of Trident missiles for such a role highlights how inappropriate it is for the UK to attempt to remain a member of the nuclear club.

In trying to cover all bases, from counter-insurgency to projecting marine and air power across the globe to remaining an independent nuclear power, the danger is that the UK will perform none of those roles well. As we have seen, when the budget is squeezed, lives are put at risk by inadequate equipment for our front-line troops and poor standards of protection for those working in the background. Too much of the track record of recent conflicts speaks of ill-prepared interventions and badly planned and poorly resourced rebuilding programmes. The UK Government's track record suggests that they should consider how better to punch within their weight, instead of continuing constantly to strive for overreach, which can only damage the UK's reputation and cause the kind of unintended consequences we face in Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I am sorry, but I have to lower the limit to four minutes. I urge Members not to take interventions; otherwise, we will not get everybody in.

6.10 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate, and in doing so I want to reflect on the pageantry and ceremony of last week's occasion. Having thought about how that tradition fits in with the wider issue of human rights, the lived experience of all the citizens of our country and the growing inequalities in our land, I confess to finding it all somewhat uncomfortable.

Last year was the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and the beginning of our human rights story. That milestone in civil and human rights laid the foundations for the Chartists, the Levellers, the suffragettes and other movements that have believed that citizens ought to be equal under the rule of law and protected from the exploitation of political power.

I find myself questioning how all those hard-won rights sit with the realities of the lives of the citizens of our country, because they are the reason we are here in this place. For example, cuts to legal aid are turning access to justice from a right for all into the preserve of a wealthy few. The absence of accountability for the powerful in cases of historical injustices fuels the notion that the powerful in our society are above the law. Attacks on our rights and the failure to hold transgressors

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to justice are undermining civil and human rights both at home and abroad. The exorbitant fees that are now paid in employment tribunal cases have eroded the ability of working people to seek justice for abuses in the workplace, as was fully intended.

Ensuring that people have access to justice is a fundamental part of our democracy, as everybody, regardless of their personal circumstances, should be entitled to equal treatment under the law. It is the poorest and the most marginalised who find themselves without legal representation when they face legal problems, and that has become worse as our welfare system has been made ever more punitive, punishing the most vulnerable in our land.

The current undermining of access to justice is mirrored in cases of historical injustice that have not yet been addressed. The Hillsborough disaster is a poignant illustration of how justice was denied to ordinary people to protect the interests of the politically powerful. The recent verdict of the inquest that supporters were unlawfully killed owing to grossly negligent failures by the police and ambulance services to fulfil their duty of care was nearly three decades too late. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) is to be wholeheartedly commended for his efforts to secure truth and justice for the Hillsborough campaigners. The Home Secretary also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

That the friends and families who said goodbye to loved ones who went to enjoy a game of football and never returned had to wait 27 years for an inquest to conclude what an entire city already knew was shameful. However, I want to send a message of full support to all the police officers throughout the UK who go about their duties diligently every day to keep us safe. My criticisms are not of them—they do brilliant work, day in, day out—but of the rotten culture that was all too pervasive. It is our duty to ensure that the truth is revealed in all its horror, so as to extinguish any last vestiges of such corrupt thinking and ensure that such disasters are never repeated. Nothing short of a cultural shift will suffice.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. *The Sun* and Kelvin MacKenzie will never be forgiven for their dreadful slurs and insults. In remembering the 96, many of us will never forget the infamous article in *The Spectator* that was published under the editorship of the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), with its condemnation of an entire city and its people—and he wants to be Prime Minister!

Hillsborough is not an isolated instance of historical injustice; there are others that I would like to have addressed. This is ultimately about how we view ourselves as a society and what sort of country we want to be. I contend that if we do not look at such injustices with great honesty, we will never learn their lessons. I hope that any discussion of the Human Rights Act will be framed in that context, so that we can properly examine the lessons to be learned from those terrible events.

6.14 pm

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald). I am pleased the debate is focusing, among other things, on human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about the situation in Bangladesh, particularly as it relates to Great Britain.

I readily accept that other countries require the Government's attention—not least Syria and Ukraine, as mentioned in the Queen's Speech—but the situation in Bangladesh is rapidly deteriorating. Since the failed general election on 5 January 2014, Bangladesh has gradually slid into chaos. We now see political intimidation, fraudulent elections, disappearances, a loss of media freedom, a breakdown in human rights and the creation of a culture of fear. Let me provide some brief examples.

Human Rights Watch has criticised the authorities for the excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings. The police are accused of human rights abuses and of disappearing political opponents. The media are having undue pressure placed on them, and the justice system is now biased and is being used to silence the Government's political opponents—only last week, a leader of a political opposition party was hanged as a result of the tribunal that is currently taking place in the country.

There are three reasons why I raise my concerns about Bangladesh. First, we have to think about the awful human rights abuses people in that country are having to endure. Secondly, as the country slips further into chaos, we should not underestimate the immigration problems we could have here. Our countries are strongly connected, and we have a large diaspora here already. Bangladesh has a population of over 160 million; if civil war breaks out, a lot of asylum seekers will look to come to this country, and we should bear that in mind. Thirdly, civil society has been shrunk in Bangladesh, and that space is now being filled by extremists. The Government rightly talked in the Queen's Speech about tackling extremism, and one of their priorities must be Bangladesh. Let me briefly illustrate why.

During April, people started hacking others to death for having secular views or because of their sexuality. Someone was killed on 6 April. Someone else was hacked to death on 23 April. People were also killed on 25 April and 30 April. All those crimes were either al-Qaeda-related or Daesh-related. We are beginning to see extremism flourish. Not only is that alarming for Bangladesh, but it should be concerning for Britain. Given the strong ties between our two countries, many of which should be celebrated, we must be vigilant about some of that extremism transferring from that country to ours.

Hon. Members may be aware of the murder of my constituent, Mr Jalal Uddin, in Rochdale on 18 February. I want to say very little about that, because the issue will come before the courts. However, I can say that recent media reports have made it clear that anti-terror police have been involved in the case and that there are concerns about it being linked to extremism.

Let me finish by making this point: as the situation in Bangladesh escalates, it could have profound consequences for Britain—even at a very local level, in towns such as Rochdale.

6.18 pm

**Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I will try to get my speech flowing now that I have cut it so much. I wish to focus my remarks on justice and prison reform—a key aspect of keeping people safe in this country.

It is a pleasure to serve on the Justice Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and along with the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who has had to leave the Chamber.

The current state of the prison and criminal justice system means that that system is seriously failing society as a whole. I reiterate the comments I made in the House on 27 January, when I warmly welcomed and supported the statement by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, in which he expressed his desire to reform our prison system. The Ministry of Justice has sought to improve prison safety through a range of legislative, operational and staff recruitment measures. The Ministry hoped that prison safety would stabilise. In reality, it has deteriorated further and continues to do so. It is imperative that further attention is paid to bringing prisoners back under firmer control, reversing recent trends in the escalation of violence, self-harm and suicides. If we do not bring this under control soon, that will seriously undermine the wider reforms we are awaiting.

Ministers frequently assert that problems in different areas of the public services are not all about money. Of course, this is the case. Appropriate management, support and effective allocation of resources is essential, but in the prison and criminal justice system this is no longer a viable line of argument. We need sufficient resources and we need them now, or a crisis will become an absolute catastrophe. Our prison population continues to rise, with 7,000 fewer prison officers and 2,500 more prisoners. Psychoactive drugs are being dropped in by drones, and other drugs taken in.

There has been a serious recruitment and retention problem. Last year, 2,250 extra prison officers were recruited. That resulted in a net gain of 440, but many of them left. In fact, that figure has now gone up to 530 because we have recruited since 2015. How can officers be retained in an environment that is regularly on the verge of riots? That gives rise to questions about health and safety policy and the management arrangements for implementing the policies in prison. We need to get prison officers in, and we need them immediately. That requires money. It also requires an acknowledgement that warm words about efficiency and getting more for less are nonsense when it comes down to potentially bringing down the whole system.

I have to ask Members of the House who they think would do a prison officer's job at the moment. A prison officer's basic starting salary is £17,735 basic, or £9.22 per hour, exempting antisocial hours payments, and having had years of real-terms pay cuts. By 2020, with the full implementation of the Government's national living wage, their basic pay will be very little over the legal minimum, disregarding the antisocial hours premium.

I warmly recognise and accept the letters dated 18 and 19 May that we received from the Secretary of State. However, we need to address the problems across the whole prison estate, not just in six prisons. It must be done, and done quickly.

Several hon. Members rose—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I am afraid I am going to have to drop the time limit to three minutes.

6.22 pm

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I want to use the time available to present a positive case for these islands remaining within the European Union and to dispel some of the myths on which the Brexit case has been built. We hear regularly, and have heard again today, the fantasy about laws being passed by unelected bureaucrats. That is a bit ironic in a Parliament that is home to the second-biggest unelected, undemocratic legislative body in the whole world. It is also completely untrue. The European Commission is unelected, but it has no powers whatsoever to pass legislation. Any legislation proposed by the Commission must be approved by the European Parliament, which is at least as democratic as this Parliament because it is elected on a proportional system, so there cannot be a majority in the European Parliament without a majority vote by the people of Europe. Legislation also has to be agreed by Council meetings at which a UK Minister is always entitled to be present and to have a say equal to that of our 27 partners.

These myths are allowed to gain currency only because UK citizens are among the worst, if not the worst, informed in the whole of Europe about what the European Union is actually about. That is a matter of deep shame for this and previous Governments, as well as an indictment of those in the media who claim to inform us about these important issues. Why are Council meetings, in particular, so shrouded in secrecy? It is because UK Ministers choose to make them so. In just three months—the first three months of 2016—the European Scrutiny Committee, of which I am a member, published no fewer than 37 different findings that were intensely critical of the Government's treatment of the Committee. Words like "cursory", "unsatisfactory" and "unacceptable" were used time and again. At the close of the last parliamentary Session, there were 13 important European documents that the Scrutiny Committee had asked be debated either on the Floor of the House or in Committee, but the Government had chosen not to find time. Four of those documents had been waiting since before the general election last year. They were important enough to require debate by Members, but the Government had chosen not to allow that debate.

We talk about a lack of scrutiny and a lack of transparency in the European Union and its institutions, but I do not think the fault lies with Europe. I think it lies squarely with the UK Government and Ministers. Perhaps if the Government were elected on a more representative and proportional basis, and if we reformed the way in which Parliament is able to hold the Government properly to account, many of these myths would not have currency and we would not face the possibility of cutting ourselves out of a Europe that should be a force for the most progressive social justice programme anywhere on the planet.

6.25 pm

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The general consensus is that we are debating a very thin Queen's Speech, the most striking aspect of which is the lack of attention paid to defence and our armed

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forces. Today, I want to speak about keeping our people safe at home and abroad—a subject that this Government seem constantly willing to sacrifice to accommodate the obsession their right wing has with the EU.

This Government are slavishly dedicated to renewing the UK's discredited and unusable nuclear deterrent, despite the effect that might have on the rest of our conventional forces and capabilities. That is a serious matter. Time does not allow me to dwell on the knock-on effects Trident renewal will have on our armed forces personnel, but they include the 1% pay freeze that has been built into all MOD calculations and will result in a real-terms pay cut for those who give so much. I assure the Secretary of State that the Scottish National party group of MPs will hold him to account on every aspect of Trident renewal and every aspect of protecting our service personnel.

I do not have time to highlight the lack of any sort of timeframe for the main gate for Trident—or weapons of mass destruction—or indeed any idea that there will be no single main gate decision to be made by this Parliament. That is an absurdity in a programme that is predicted to cost more than £167 billion—or, as some recent estimates suggest, £205 billion. In our Queen's Speech—an alternative Queen's Speech—we would have a nuclear weapons consent Bill, to be agreed to within the Scottish Parliament before another generation of weapons of mass destruction is located in Scotland.

The SNP would also commit to keeping our people safe by introducing a defence shipbuilding Bill. This Government have failed to reassure the Royal Navy on the number of frigates it so desperately needs. Such a Bill would have the knock-on effect of increasing certainty for thousands of skilled shipbuilding workers, particularly on the Clyde. As the Minister for Defence Procurement suggested in answer to a parliamentary question just last month, the whole programme for the purchase of the Type 26s has been delayed, with most estimates giving a date of late 2017 for the cutting of steel on those vessels.

During the referendum campaign, a clear vow was made to the Scottish people. On the basis of the rejection of the Type 26 programme, that vow has been broken by this Government. We should do all we can to ensure that the vow is kept and the programme reinstated.

6.28 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Gracious Address should have given our nation a sense of mission and purpose, vision and ambition, opportunity and hope. It should have charted a course for a fairer, more equitable country, securely placed in our ever interconnected but ever challenged world. Instead, the Government chose to draw back into minutiae with micromanagement, permissions, frameworks, reorganisations and even encouragement and promotion, but not to address the big issues facing our globe at this time—a globe in desperate need. That is why the country is so frustrated: it cannot grasp what we are doing, where we are going and how we are going to get there on the big challenges before us. I am reminded of Proverbs 29, where it says:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”.

That is why leadership is so important and why our being at the table to influence change is vital for our future.

I wanted to speak in today's debate because that is exactly why we are where we are with the EU. We have a Government who have lacked vision and ambition in Europe these past six years, and who instead of leading Europe and setting the agenda have drawn down to the fringes and lost their way until they realised what is at stake. Even now we are seeing blame being placed at the door of the EU, rather than at the door of No. 10.

What are the issues that we should be debating this week? Climate change, population expansion, 60 million people on the move on our planet, disease, famine, humanitarian disaster, instability and conflict. There was not a whisper of any of these issues in the Queen's Speech, yet right across our country there is a deafening chorus crying out for a response and leadership on these very issues. Even worse, we see the Brexiters wanting to take us into the wilderness, without being able to articulate where we are heading, how we are going to engage with nations, how we are going to trade, how we are going to protect jobs and provide for our future security, or how we are going to address climate change and find the solutions to the issues facing the populations under so much threat. That why our membership of the EU is so crucial.

There is so much I could have said today. I believe we need not and should not be fearful as a nation about what is happening on our planet. Britain needs to find its confidence again, with vision and ambition to lead—to lead at the heart of Europe so that we can take action on the issues that people on our streets are looking to us to lead on. That is why on 23 June we need to vote to remain and to take the lead in our world.

6.31 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I cannot help but feel an ominous sense of *déjà vu*. Prior to the general election, the Conservatives vowed to bring forward their British Bill of Rights proposals in their first 100 days in office. Kicked into the long grass last year, these plans have once again reared their ugly head. Like many in this place, I find it infuriating that the Government refuse to drop their attack on human rights. Let us be clear: that is exactly what this is. No amount of Government spin will convince me or many others that plans to scrap the Human Rights Act are anything other than an outright assault on human rights themselves.

The Human Rights Act is a very important piece of legislation, and the Government have seriously underestimated sentiment towards it. There is little public appetite for their plans, and plenty of opposition. The Prime Minister's plans are not that new. Let us remember that it is more than a decade since he set up a panel of legal experts to draw up a British Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act. He has been utterly unable to sell these plans 10 years on, despite being in power for more than half that time. Rather than admit defeat and allow these plans to die a dignified death, he insists on keeping them on life support. His pig-headedness is becoming a source of huge embarrassment, again.

The existing legislation is a very modern Bill of Rights. It protects sovereignty and safeguards the rights and freedoms across all our nations. It underpins the Good Friday agreement, and the Government's plans could be a breach of that monumental and hard-won

concord. Indeed, if the Government press ahead with their plans, they risk eliciting a constitutional crisis. It is time the Government stopped fluffing this issue. They should either kill the Bill or introduce concrete plans.

The Government must disclose details and a timetable for the consultation on the British Bill of Rights. The consultation needs to be far-reaching. Although downplayed by the Government, this will mean a fundamental change in the rights of all British citizens. Any consultation held must engage civic society. In that regard, the Government could learn from the inclusive manner with which Scottish parliamentary consultation is carried out. Views from the public are actively sought, with consultations well advertised, utilising social media channels, as well as conventional ones.

Of course, if the Government want to kick their plans into the long grass again this year, there will be no complaints from me. I only ask that they kick them hard enough to ensure that they are unable ever to find them again.

6.34 pm

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): This has been an excellent and informative debate, during which we have been treated to the marvellous maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore). He told us that his constituents have set him the goal of being half as good as Huw. On today's evidence, and given that he is already making the case for steelworkers who will lobby Parliament tomorrow, he will pass that test with flying colours. We wish him well.

A clear majority of speakers, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), have made the case that Britain will be immeasurably stronger by remaining part of the European Union. Just as the economic case for leaving has crumbled under questioning in recent days, so today's debate has put the security case for Brexit under intense scrutiny and found it to be illusory. A vote to leave is a vote for isolation, and that simply makes no sense whatsoever in a highly volatile and unpredictable world. Nobody put that case more powerfully than my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Foreign Secretary, who gave yet another tour de force in this House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shadow Foreign Secretary!"] I am sure everyone will agree that it is only a matter of time.

We agree with the Government that our membership of the EU strengthens our security at home and abroad, but we do not agree that the Bills in the Gracious Speech will make our society stronger or fairer. Indeed, they could do the opposite, undermine our standing in the world and expose us to greater risks from radicalisation.

Let me quote from the Gracious Speech:

"My Government will bring forward proposals for a British Bill of Rights."

That was, in fact, from the 2015 Gracious Speech. This year's said:

"Proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights."

Is it not a little unfair on Her Majesty to ask her to keep reading out a cut-and-paste Queen's Speech?

One can speculate why this long-promised Tory Bill of Rights has never materialised. Might it be because it springs from an impulse for political grandstanding,

rather than a carefully thought-through response to the challenges of the modern world? I fear that the same can also be said of the counter-extremism Bill. In both cases it seems that the Government are opening Pandora's box without fully knowing where they are going or what they are trying to achieve. In areas as sensitive as these, that is a dangerous thing to do.

Let me take each Bill in turn. A few weeks ago, the Home Secretary gave a speech in which she called for Britain to leave the European convention on human rights. What a terrible message that would send to the rest of the world, but what a boost for regimes that seek to deny human rights to their own citizens to claim that Britain is doing the same, as the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), eloquently pointed out in his speech. Of course, the nuances of our debate would be lost on the other side of the world, and Britain's moral authority on the world stage would be severely dented.

A few days ago, however, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that the Prime Minister did not support any change to the ECHR, so we have the Home Secretary saying one thing and the Prime Minister another. How can we possibly have confidence in what the Government are proposing when their position is so confused?

They have lost sight of a simple point, which might explain why they are so muddled on this matter: the Human Rights Act is a British Bill of Rights. These are the basic rights that Britain wrote and promoted around the world in the post-war period—rights that protect ordinary people from the unaccountable power of the state and vested interests.

Look at some of the examples of how those rights have helped people fight injustice. I think of the elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Driscoll, who had lived together as a married couple for 65 years but who were then put in separate care homes by a local authority. They used the Human Rights Act to be brought back together. I also think that if the Human Rights Act had been in place in 1989, the Hillsborough families would have had much more ability to challenge the cruel decision of the original inquest to impose a 3.15 cut-off time, which prevented them from finding out basic details about what happened to their loved ones.

One can only surmise that the Government's purpose in legislating in this area would be to water down the rights in the Human Rights Act and to add more qualifications. I ask the Home Secretary: how is that going to build a stronger and fairer country? It will not do so, and that is why Labour will proudly defend its Human Rights Act and fight any attempt to weaken human rights laws in this country.

Similarly, I struggle to see how the proposed counter-extremism Bill will do anything other than undermine community cohesion. I would be the first to say that the Government are right to want to tackle extremism, and I support them in that aim. However, the question is not whether we do it, but how we do it. I am genuinely concerned that the Government are getting their approach drastically wrong. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) was at her best on this subject today. I say this not out of party politics nor a desire to score points, but because I am worried about the deep despondency caused by the existing legislation, as I hear in the Muslim community

[*Andy Burnham*]

when I visit mosques and madrassahs. If the House legislates in haste once again, the damage could be profound.

At the weekend, the Home Secretary received a letter from police representatives, faith groups and civil society organisations expressing major concerns about the proposed Bill. She cannot just ignore this and plough on regardless. The Prevent duty to report extremist behaviour is creating a feeling that the Muslim community is unfairly targeted and monitored. It is building a climate of suspicion and distrust. In my view, if the Government legislate further and extend what is perceived to be an illiberal and discriminatory approach, far from tackling extremism, they will risk creating the conditions for it to flourish.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I understand the shadow Home Secretary's concern, but the rest of the nation knows that the real threat we face is a specific one. As I said in my speech, for which he was not in the Chamber, the threat is specific: with Islamic fundamentalism, barbarity on a scale previously unimagined is being carried out in the name of Islam, and it is up to the Muslim community in Britain to address this problem in its midst.

**Andy Burnham:** The way to address the hon. Gentleman's point is not to tar everybody with the same brush and throw suspicion on the whole community. That is the language we have heard from Conservative Members. We have heard the Prime Minister say that parts of the Muslim community are "quietly condoning" extremism. That does not win hearts and minds in the community, and we need 99.9% of people to work with the Government to find the very small number of people who may be at risk of radicalisation.

Rather than compounding the damage by legislating in haste, I urge Ministers to take a step back and to set up a cross-party review of how the statutory duty is working in practice. That would be much more beneficial than pushing on with further legislation.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would accept that when we dealt with the totalitarian theories of communism and fascism in the past, we never made illegal the holding of such views; we made illegal the carrying out of such views with any form of violent action. However, does he also accept that where children and indoctrination in secret are concerned, we must intervene if we are not to see the radicalisation of a new generation?

**Andy Burnham:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. That is why it is important to step with great care into the space that the Bill proposes to tread into. Talk of gagging orders and closure orders will be perceived as an attack on the whole community. That is how people in this country feel right now. There is no difference between those of us on either side of the House: we want to tackle extremism and radicalisation in the most effective way. I simply put it to the Government that they are not achieving that at the moment.

Britain must remain a place where everybody is free to express and develop their beliefs without the fear of being spied on. That freedom is what makes this country a wonderful place to live and worship in, and we must

never lose it. At the same time, we must be steadfast in fighting all forms of extremism—including Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and far-right extremism—to prevent any suggestion that extremism is the preserve of just one community.

Let me touch briefly on prisons. We welcome the Government's efforts to reform and modernise our prison system, with a greater focus on rehabilitation and prisoner education. It was a pleasure to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) speak on that topic. However, there is a real issue with our prisons. The former chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, has talked of prisons being in their worst state for 10 years and as

"places of violence, squalor and idleness."

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) spoke very powerfully about prison safety and the need to improve staffing numbers. I hope the Government listen to her before they proceed with the prisons Bill.

I will end on a more constructive note. There are two carry-over Bills in the Gracious Speech on which it might be possible to build more consensus. As the Home Secretary knows, we share her goal of putting an updated law on the statute book governing the use of investigatory powers and giving the police and the security services the tools to do their job in the digital age. But we continue to have serious concerns about the Bill as currently drafted, as it does not yet contain sufficiently strong safeguards and human rights protections.

A few weeks ago, I wrote to the Home Secretary setting out seven issues on which we want significant improvement. Yesterday, she wrote to me on two of the issues I highlighted. I have to say that I found her letter extremely encouraging. She gave a commitment in the letter to an independent review of the operational case for the bulk powers. That review was called for in Committee by the shadow Immigration Minister, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). It is not only the right thing to do, but could build trust in the whole process. I am pleased that she has agreed in the letter to look at having a review and has approached David Anderson QC to lead it. The Opposition strongly welcome that development, which we believe will build trust and support behind the Bill.

The second issue that the Home Secretary has written to me about is our concern about the targeting of trade unions. The Opposition have not just concerns but proof that in the past the security services have targeted trade unions, in particular, in the case of the Shrewsbury 24. The Home Secretary's letter contains a suggestion that she will change the Bill to ensure that investigatory powers cannot be used to monitor legitimate trade union activity. That is a major concession—historic, even—and I am certain that it will go a long way to reassuring Opposition Members. There is still a considerable way to go before the Investigatory Powers Bill becomes acceptable, but this letter shows that the Home Secretary is listening, which bodes well for the rest of the Bill's passage.

I will touch briefly on the Policing and Crime Bill. Colleagues on all sides of the House will know that I have written to them seeking support for a number of



changes in response to the Hillsborough verdict. Those include making sure that bereaved families have parity of legal funding at inquests where the police are represented and removing any time limit on misconduct proceedings to prevent retirement from being used as a route to avoid them. I am grateful for the support I have had from colleagues from Plaid Cymru and the Green party, and I urge other parties to offer the same support. The best message we could possibly send to the Hillsborough families—this point was made very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)—is to come together across the Floor of this House to make Hillsborough a moment of real change.

My experience of working with the Home Secretary on Hillsborough is a reminder of the incredible power we in this place have in our hands to change lives for the better when we put differences aside and work as one. But we do not always choose to use that power. I believe that the issues we have discussed today—the promotion of human rights and the eradication of extremism—are bigger than party politics. They are issues on which our most vulnerable communities will look to us to achieve the maximum amount of political consensus, because that in turn will give strength back to those communities. I urge the Government to keep that point in mind as they bring their new Bills forward.

6.48 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** As is fitting for a debate on the Queen's Speech, we have had a very wide-ranging and significant set of contributions from right hon. and hon. Members. Many speeches referred to human rights, to the European Union and to counter-extremism. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) referred to housing development in Birmingham but also to international development; I pay tribute to his work as Secretary of State for International Development. The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) referred to buses, which of course were mentioned in the Gracious Address.

I will respond to some of the main points in a moment, but I first join the shadow Home Secretary in commending the hon. Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) for his maiden speech. I apologise that I was not in the Chamber to hear it, but his predecessor was a much respected and well-liked Member of the House. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman reaching his century—I think he referred to that in his speech—and, from his contribution today, it seems that not only will he be an excellent representative for his constituents, but that he too will be a much respected and well-liked Member of the House.

I also commend the two opening speeches in this debate. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke with characteristic authority, knowledge and understanding of the wide range of foreign affairs that require our attention. As he said, the world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain, and it is against that background that the Queen's Speech referred to a number of issues of national security and defence, including Trident. I disagree with the hon. Members for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), because Trident is an important part of our defence and national security.

Against that dangerous background, it is right to ensure that our law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies have the powers they need in today's world, where criminals and terrorists increasingly use new technology. Our agencies must be able to operate in the digital age, and I am grateful to the shadow Home Secretary for his comments on the exchange that we have had in the past couple days on a number of matters regarding the carry-over Investigatory Powers Bill. I intend to continue working with him and the shadow Immigration Minister—who made an important contribution alongside my ministerial colleagues in debates on this matter in Committee—to ensure that we provide a Bill that does what it needs to do, and provides those operational powers and also contains the necessary safeguards.

One of my abiding memories of this House is the day on which the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) came to this Chamber following a by-election, and of the look—the beam—of absolute pride on his late father's face at his son coming to this House. As he said, his father would not have agreed with the substance of what he said about the European Union, but he would have welcomed and been proud of the eloquence and passion with which the right hon. Gentleman put his case.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the European Union, including the hon. Members for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), and for York Central (Rachael Maskell). Some were not in favour of remaining in the European Union, including my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) was concerned about some of the defence issues. I understand that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who serves on the Defence Committee, took issue with some comments that the Chair of that Committee made in the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said that although he was originally against membership of the EU, he was now in favour of it because of the various protections that he felt it provided. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) reminded us that we need to remember Britain's role in the world, as well as the benefits that working together in co-operation with other countries can bring.

**Drew Hendry:** Among many things to disagree with and criticise, I would like to focus on a positive point about work abroad. Stephanie Inglis is a Commonwealth games medal-winning athlete, and she is in a critical condition in a coma in Vietnam. She has received overwhelming public support for her GoFundMe page, in contrast to the refusal of insurance sold by Debenhams to pay out. I am in regular contact with the family, and they are very grateful for Foreign and Commonwealth Office support. They need more help with translation services, and I would like to reflect their good wishes that more work can be done. I wonder whether the Home Secretary agrees.

**Mrs May:** The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case about the sad circumstances in which his constituent finds herself. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was here earlier, and I

[Mrs May]

think the hon. Gentleman was able to speak to him briefly about this issue. As he sees, other Foreign Office Ministers are present and have heard his point, as has the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims. I am sure that support will be forthcoming for the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

A number of hon. Members referred to the proposed counter-extremism Bill. It is absolutely right that our proud tradition of defending shared values has allowed Britain to grow into the diverse, tolerant and inclusive country it is today. We live in a society where we are free to decide how to live, what to wear and how to worship according to our beliefs. We are free to take advantage of education and employment opportunities. However, we also have a responsibility to respect the rights of others. We should be concerned about, and stand up to, those who seek to sow the seeds of division between our communities, pushing us further apart rather than choosing to bring us together. Legislation can only be part of the answer, but where there is a gap in the law we must act. That is why we will introduce a counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who raised specific concerns about the Bill, that there will be consultation. We recognise the sensitivities involved.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs May:** I do not have much time.

I mentioned the European Union. I have to say to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) that I think he is trying to face in two directions at the same time on this issue. The hon. Member for Ilford South was absolutely right: the Scottish National party view appears to be to want to be in the EU, but it would actually like an exit vote so it can have another independence vote in Scotland. We should all be doing what we believe is right for the whole of the United Kingdom.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Mrs May:** I have limited time in which to finish my remarks.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) referred to the institutions of the European Union. It is the Ministers in this Government who have been standing up in the EU for British interests, and long may that continue. As the shadow Home Secretary said, from everything I have seen, I believe we are safer and more secure inside the EU.

There were a lot of contributions on human rights, including from the right hon. and learned Member for

Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights; my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), who referred to human rights in relation to Russia; the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry); the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier); and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), who talked about human rights in Bangladesh. I can confirm, as the Foreign Secretary said, that human rights are mainstreamed throughout Foreign Office thinking. It is one of the issues we look at in other areas too, such as policing arrangements, exchange of legal information and so on.

There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding behind some of the contributions. Some Members, across the House, seem to think that human rights started with either the European convention on human rights or the Human Rights Act 1998. They did not. This is the country that has the proud tradition of Magna Carta. This is the country that has led the way on human rights. Human rights do not reside in just one piece of legislation—that is the important point. Our commitment is to bring forward the Bill of Rights. We will have significantly more consultation and scrutiny of the Bill of Rights than there was for the Human Rights Act, which was introduced without formal consultation and within just six months of the 1997 general election.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) referred to Hillsborough. Everybody in this House was shocked when they heard the verdicts of the independent panel. It is important that we learn the lessons, which is why Bishop James Jones will be working with the families on that.

It is the first duty of Government to ensure the safety and security of citizens. The measures in the Queen Speech will do just that. We are safer and more secure when our police forces are transparent and accountable, and when criminal gangs are no longer able to use the financial system to manage the proceeds of their crimes and evade justice. We are safer and more secure when our prisons are not just places to punish. We also heard many contributions on the importance of prison reform, including from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who did indeed, as Justice Secretary, start the Government down the path of this important prison reform.

This Queen's Speech is the mark of a reforming Government. Its reforms will put justice at the heart of our public services, protect the vulnerable and reshape our criminal justice system in the name of creating one nation, and I commend it to the House.

7 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)). Ordered, that the debate be resumed tomorrow.*

## Speaker's Statement

6.59 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I must tell the House that nominations closed at 5 o'clock this afternoon for candidates for the post of Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. One nomination has been received. A ballot will therefore not be held tomorrow. I congratulate Mr Ian Mearns upon his re-election as Chair of the Committee.

## Business without Debate

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

*Ordered,*

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 21 and 28 October; 4, 18 and 25 November; 2 and 16 December; 13, 20 and 27 January 2017; 3 and 24 February 2017; and 24 March 2017.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

## Budget for Community Pharmacies

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

7 pm

**Michael Dugher** (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am grateful for the selection of this debate on the budget for community pharmacies, which the Government announced in December would be cut by £170 million in 2016-17—a cut of 6%.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members, from both sides of the House, who attended the parliamentary event today organised by the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, Pharmacy Voice, the National Pharmacy Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to stress the importance of safeguarding a strong community pharmacy sector. I also thank the cross-party delegation of Members of this House and the other place, as well as patients and pharmacists, who came together to deliver a petition to 10 Downing Street today against the Government's planned cut. The petition was signed by more than 1.8 million people, making it the most signed petition on any health issue in history.

It is clear, therefore, that there is massive opposition out there to the Government's planned cuts, and it is entirely right, given the huge public interest, that we should have this debate today. The Government must now listen to the public and consider the mounting evidence showing that the cuts will be bad for many of our local communities, the pharmacy sector, public health and the wider NHS. Just yesterday, Pharmacy Voice published a comprehensive analysis of the merits of community pharmacies. The report, "Dispensing Health Equality", found that community pharmacies "are not just an invaluable community asset, dispensing medicines and vital public health services, they are potentially a key to unlocking deep-rooted health inequalities."

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Instead of cutting the budget for pharmacies, we could use them much more effectively—for example, in combating diabetes. Rather than getting GPs to test patients for diabetes, pharmacies could do it more efficiently and effectively.

**Michael Dugher:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Given the success of community pharmacies, we should be doing far more with them, not cutting them. I shall come to some of the arguments for that during my remarks.

In the course of this campaign, I have been lucky enough to visit some excellent community pharmacies in almost every part of my constituency, campaigning with local councillors, listening to residents who rely greatly on the services these pharmacies provide and meeting staff who are among the very best healthcare professionals in the country.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Like him, I have visited several pharmacies in my constituency. They make the point that we are short of GPs and that, in that environment, it makes no sense to cut a service that can provide the support necessary to make up for the

[Bill Esterson]

challenging circumstances that GPs face. Pharmacists can often provide advice and support to those who otherwise would go to their GP. In the absence of those GPs, pharmacies are essential.

**Michael Dugher:** My hon. Friend is of course absolutely right. One of the successful community pharmacy operators in my own constituency, Lo's pharmacy, which has 20 community pharmacies across Yorkshire, was set up by a fantastic individual, Mr Steve Lo, who was brought up in Hoyland Common in my constituency and remains the firm's managing director. Of the Government's proposals, he told me:

"There is a real and present danger that these cuts will make many pharmacies unviable. That can only mean a longer trip, not just for your prescription, but for free advice on minor ailments or medicines as well as a number of other NHS led services, and is only going to put more pressure",

as my hon. Friend just said,

"on GP surgeries and Accident and Emergency departments."

I wholeheartedly endorse his comments.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely debate. Pharmacists have become very much like GPs—they are part of the community. This Government are always telling us all how they are taking big government out to the communities, but here they are again cutting another community facility, as well as cutting local government facilities.

**Michael Dugher:** My hon. Friend is right. A modern community pharmacy of the type he referred to has so much to offer patients—from free medical advice and dispensing prescriptions to, crucially, reducing strain on other NHS primary care services.

Community pharmacies are of growing importance. Figures from the Health and Social Care Information Centre show that since 2005, the number of prescriptions dispensed has risen by 50%, with over a billion items dispensed in the community last year. There have been increases in the number of items dispensed every year for the last decade, as community pharmacies have become more important for public healthcare. Staff at community pharmacies, trained pharmacists, technicians, dispensers and counter assistants are often the first port of call for an unwell patient or indeed a carer. Some 1.2 million health-related visits are made to community pharmacies across the country every single day—more than to any other primary care provider. The average person visits a pharmacy 14 times a year, and there are 11,500 community pharmacies across England.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): Where we have seen quite serious reorganisations of NHS services and A&E departments downgraded, part of the justification for it has been the role of pharmacies in delivering the "care close to home" agenda. If we see anything in the region of 3,000 pharmacies close across the country, that will raise very serious questions about how we have reorganised our existing NHS structures.

**Michael Dugher:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. I know what a formidable campaigner she has been on this issue in her local community. I pay tribute to her,

and not simply because she is also my Whip and occasionally allows me to go home—though I would not rule it out as a contributing factor!

The community pharmacy network is made up of trusted local chemists who are rooted in the communities they serve. I do not doubt that the Minister and his Department share with me an understanding of the vital importance of community pharmacies. Indeed, in the Government's own letter last December to the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, which announced the cut, it was stressed that community pharmacies must be at the "heart of the NHS". The letter went on to praise the excellent work of community pharmacies

"in prevention of ill health; support for healthy living; support for self-care for minor ailments and long-term conditions; medication reviews in care homes; and as part of more integrated local care models."

That is all true, so why on earth are the Government pressing ahead with a massive arbitrary budget cut for community pharmacies that will, by the Minister's own admission at a meeting of the all-party pharmacy group in January, potentially force up to 3,000 local chemists to close?

A properly funded and well-resourced community pharmacy sector is vital for enhancing public health, reducing risk to the public and mitigating downstream costs to the NHS. This is the key argument. In his response, the Minister will no doubt rightly draw on the financial pressures facing the NHS, but is not this cut in the community pharmacy budget a false economy? By contributing to improved public health—frankly, by heading off some people at the pass—our community pharmacies prevent patients from resorting to visits to the GP surgery or the local hospital.

The Government's timing could not be worse. We need our community pharmacies more than ever, given that we have an NHS that is so self-evidently in crisis. A&E departments are under enormous pressure on the Government's watch. In the three months to March this year, only 87.9% of patients visiting them were seen within four hours, which missed the Government's own target of 95%. Despite the brilliant efforts of NHS staff in my own area—which was visited recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), in his capacity as shadow Minister—the figures were even worse, and, indeed, were going backwards. Just 86.7% of patients were seen within four hours in Barnsley Hospital's A&E department, down from 87.2% in February and 89% in January.

Cutting the budget for community pharmacies will do nothing to alleviate the crisis. In fact, Ministers risk deepening the problems that face our A&E departments by removing access to the medical advice that those pharmacies offer before patients feel the need to go to hospital.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): Allison's chemist in Cocker mouth, which is in my constituency, provided a very important resource for local people after the floods. Rather than people going to hospital because they needed care, Allison's visited them in their homes or where they were staying. This cut means that we shall risk losing that kind of important support.

**Michael Dugher:** My hon. Friend has given a compelling example of the contribution made by community

pharmacies—not just those in her constituency, for there are similar stories in many other parts of the country.

Another argument for arguing against the proposed cuts is the crisis relating to GP access. Millions of people are waiting longer for appointments: 14.2 million patients had to wait for a week, or were not given an appointment at all, when they last tried to see their doctors in 2015. The truth is that the GP access crisis can only be made worse by the Government's plan to cut the community pharmacy budget.

The findings of new research carried out by YouGov, commissioned by Pharmacy Voice and published in the report yesterday, show that one in four people who would normally visit a pharmacy for advice on common ailments would instead make an appointment with their GP if their local pharmacy faced closure. The report also states that the impact of the cut would be much more severe in areas of higher deprivation, such as my constituency, and that as many as four in five people would visit their GP if their local pharmacy closed. According to the National Pharmacy Association, that would mean approximately 1 million extra people per month using GP and alternative local NHS services.

In a recent letter to the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, the Government said that they wanted

“a clinically focussed community pharmacy service that is better integrated with primary care. That will help relieve the pressure on GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments”.

I could not agree more, but how can an arbitrary cut—because that is what it is—in community pharmacies on such a scale possibly do anything other than make a bad situation in our NHS even worse, and how do the Government plan to introduce a “hub and spoke” dispensing model against a backdrop of thousands of closures in the sector?

Particularly in recent days and weeks, the Government have tried to argue that this is not the arbitrary cut that we all know it to be, and that it is not a raid on the community pharmacy budget in the Department. They now say that it is all about making the pharmacy sector stronger by eliminating what Ministers call “clusters” of chemists. However, in response to a written question on 4 May in which I asked the Government to

“make an assessment of the effect of the budget reduction for community pharmacy in 2016-17 on high street vacancy rates”, the Government conceded that they could not accurately assess the impact of the cut. They could not say how many community pharmacies would close, or, indeed, where they would close. The Minister said that the Government were

“not able to assess which pharmacies may close or what the effect on high street vacancy rates might be because we do not know the financial viability of individual businesses or the extent to which they derive income from services commissioned locally by the NHS or local authorities or have non-NHS related income.”

As I have already highlighted, the Minister previously said that he estimated that up to 3,000 community pharmacies—a quarter of all those in the country—could close as a result of this cut. However, with no planning, no strategy and no impact assessment, it is painfully obvious that the Government have not the faintest idea which community pharmacies are at risk of closure. It could be a chemist that is located in a so-called cluster, but it might well not be.

**Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the petition that went to Downing Street today was not just about 1.8 million people being concerned about their local pharmacy? Those 1.8 million people are also taxpayers who feel that this efficiency drive is going to have a negative effect on what they believe to be an important part of their communities.

**Michael Dugher:** My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I have seen the cuts to community pharmacies described as a Treasury-led process. A lot of people are paying their taxes, including the 1.8 million who have already signed the petition. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the leadership he has shown as chair of the all-party parliamentary pharmacy group.

This is not a clear, well-thought-through strategy. It is a reckless leap into the unknown, and it is the NHS, patients and every community in the country that will pay the price. For those of us who were here during the last Parliament, this is painfully reminiscent of the process involved in the passing of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, with the Government making things up as they go along and ending up in a situation where things are worse for the NHS and more money is once again wasted.

I implore the Minister to listen to Members from both sides of the House and from the other place who have voiced their real and sincere concerns. I urge the Government carefully to consider the overwhelming body of evidence from our healthcare professionals who do so much to serve our local communities and our NHS. The Government must now listen to the unprecedented 1.8 million people who have signed the petition, which states:

“We, the undersigned, believe that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service and part of the fabric of communities across England. Under new Government proposals, many pharmacies could be forced to close—depriving people of accessible medicines, advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals. It would also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services. In the interests of patient care, we urge the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary to abandon plans that put pharmacy services at risk.”

The Government must now think again.

7.18 pm

**The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) on securing this debate and on the excellent way in which he put one side of the equation as we discuss pharmacy. His timing is of course impeccable. Over the past few months, we have been consulting on our proposals for the future of community pharmacy. The consultation closes today, as he said, although it is important to note that the confidential part of the consultation with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and other key stakeholders will continue. Today is also the day on which the National Pharmacy Association has handed over its “Support Your Local Pharmacy” campaign petition, signed by 1.8 million people, to No. 10. Colleagues might have also attended today’s “Pharmacy health checks and speed briefing” event. All of this is testament to the very high regard in which community pharmacies are held by patients and the public, and the hon. Gentleman will get no argument from me or the Government that that is not the case.

[Alistair Burt]

I said that the hon. Gentleman had addressed one part of the equation. He has indicated clearly what the state of pharmacy is today, but he said very little about what pharmacy could become. I understand that, and it is in fact my job to do that. I shall set that out in a few minutes.

If I may be forgiven for saying so, the hon. Gentleman presents a case that suggests that no Labour Government or local council has ever reduced the money for any service and he gives us the clear impression that, were it left up to him, there would be money for absolutely everything. There is not. In a perfect world in which money is no object, a service can be developed and extra money can be added. In the real world, in which we have to operate, it is rather different, so let me explain exactly how we are going to do that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Alistair Burt:** The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) approached me before, so I will take one intervention from him; I will not get through my answer otherwise.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I want him to take two things into account. First, there is a correlation between clusters of community pharmacies and areas of high deprivation and associated ill health, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) said. Secondly, small, independent, local community pharmacies do not have the ability of the big multiples to negotiate bulk discount deals. Will he take those two factors into account as he moves forward?

**Alistair Burt:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He has made representations in the past, and I know how keenly he understands the matter. I will come on to discuss access to funds in due course. It will not be based purely on location, but it will take into account what he says about areas of deprivation. We recognise that these are small businesses, and I understand exactly what he says.

The proposed funding cut has understandably created uncertainty and concern. I assure the House that I see a bright future for community pharmacy and pharmacists, so I urge colleagues to see the opportunity that the consultation presents, as well as the inevitable and understandable concern around funding.

The background to the matter lies in the NHS's five-year forward view. One of its key strategic aims is to break down the traditional barriers between different primary care services, wider out-of-hospital care services and other sectors, such as social care, to deliver a more cohesive, community-based care model that is focused on keeping people healthy and helping people to manage long-term health conditions. Our vision is to achieve a transformation in primary care and out-of-hospital care more widely as we continue to move towards a seven-day health and care service. We want to empower primary care health professionals to take up opportunities to embrace new ways of working with other health professionals to transform the quality of care that they provide to patients and the public. In particular, we

want to free up pharmacists to spend more time delivering clinical and public health services to patients and the public in a range of settings.

I have seen at first hand the fantastic work that pharmacists are doing from within community pharmacies, such as in healthy living pharmacies and other settings, and colleagues have also paid tribute to that work. Pharmacy-led services, such as the recently recommissioned community pharmacy seasonal influenza vaccination programme, can help to relieve pressure on GPs and A&E departments and ensure better use of medicines, better health and better patient outcomes. There are real opportunities for pharmacists and their teams to play an even greater role in helping people with long-term conditions and helping people to make better choices to improve their health and to get the maximum benefit from their medicines.

It is not a zero-sum game of accepting the reduction in funding of £170 million—from a budget of £2.8 billion—and ending this degree of high street care and having nothing in its place. I strongly believe that we can still have a network of high street pharmacies based on a financial regime that rewards quality as well as volume while moving pharmacy into different settings. To that end, we have consulted pharmacy bodies and others, including patient and public representatives, clinical commissioning groups and health and social care providers, on how best to introduce a pharmacy integration fund from 2016-17. The fund will help us to transform how pharmacists and their teams operate in the community, bringing clear benefits to patients and the public. The fund is set to rise by an additional £20 million a year. By 2020-21, we will have invested £300 million in addition to the £31 million that NHS England is investing in funding, recruiting and employing clinical pharmacists to work alongside GPs to ease current pressures in general practice and improve patient safety. The integration fund will help to move pharmacy in a direction that supplements what is already done on the high street and in a way it might not otherwise have done.

The chief pharmaceutical officer, Dr Keith Ridge, has commissioned an independent review of community pharmacy clinical services to make recommendations on future models for commissioning pharmacy-led clinical services. I am very keen that what we are doing is seen in the context of where pharmacy is going to go—not a snapshot of how good it is now, but what it can become. Clinical pharmacists will offer complementary skills to GPs, giving patients access to a multi-disciplinary skill set, and helping GPs manage the demands on their time and provide a better experience for patients. This is a great opportunity for pharmacists wanting to make better use of their clinical skills and develop them further.

Let me give a couple of examples. At the Wallingbrook Health Group in Devon, the work of the local pharmacist on all aspects of medicines optimisation has reduced the need for patient GP appointments by 20% to 30%, making a significant impact on GP workloads and patient outcomes. In Cambridge, Sandra Prater is working with patients to optimise their medicines and supporting patients to self-manage a range of conditions, including asthma, high blood pressure and atrial fibrillation.

The reduction in funding for community pharmacy that we have set out was a commitment in last year's spending review. I want to emphasise that our aim is to

secure efficiencies, make savings and improve quality. It is most definitely not our aim to close pharmacies. I accept that it was me who said to the meeting with the all-party group that up to 3,000 pharmacies could be affected. That was me extrapolating the figures. It is not the aim of the Government to close pharmacies and, as I said in answer to the question, we do not know exactly how the funding will fall, because we do not know yet the result of the negotiations and how this will be handled. I accept that I put that figure into the public domain, but it may not happen in that way at all.

I know that many people choose to access health services through community pharmacies, and I want to assure them that our aim is to ensure that those community pharmacies upon which people depend continue to thrive. That is why we are consulting on the introduction of a pharmacy access scheme, which will provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population, as the right hon. Member for Knowsley mentioned.

Let me deal with another theme that the hon. Member for Barnsley East mentioned. Hand in hand with that approach, we want to ensure that modern community pharmacies reflect patient and public expectations, and developments in technology. Large sections of the population are now accustomed to using digital services through their phones and tablets. Why not do this for people wanting to obtain their prescription medicines? That is why we want to help those patients to get their prescriptions in a way that fits their lifestyle, by promoting the use of online click-and-collect or home-delivery models. We have also consulted on amending legislation to allow independent pharmacies to benefit from hub-and-spoke dispensing models, which facilitate more use of automation and increase efficient dispensing processes. Officials are now carefully considering the responses received and the Government will respond in due course. These are things we want to encourage people to do, but

they do not totally replace what is already being done. They might, however, free up more time for the pharmacists to spend on patient contact rather than on doing some of the other work.

The public phase of the community pharmacy consultation may now have ended, but that does not mean that we will stop listening and talking—the hon. Gentleman asked me to keep doing those things. The Department, supported by NHS England, will have further confidential negotiations with the PSNC, and there will also be a final round of confidential discussions with other key pharmacy stakeholders, who take a keen interest in the discussions in this House. Our aim is to communicate the final decisions early in July so that pharmacy contractors are fully informed in advance of the changes being implemented from October 2016.

Our proposals are informed by the discussions that have taken place and by what has been said by those involved in pharmacy in the past—the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and independent studies—about how pharmacy can move in a different direction but that the current funding structure rewards volume not quality and that changes could be made that would widen the reach of pharmacy. I believe that these ideas can be taken forward in the current context. Our proposals can truly place pharmacy at the heart of the NHS and provide a better, more integrated, service for patients and the public. I am confident that the efficiencies we have proposed can be made within community pharmacy without compromising the quality of services or the public's access to them. I want to thank those in pharmacy, who are working so hard at the moment and making their case very well, and the public who support them. I think pharmacy can have a great future, as can pharmacists.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.29 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Written Statement

*Tuesday 24 May 2016*

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Pre-Competitiveness Council

**The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson):** My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and Minister for Intellectual Property (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) has today made the following statement.

The Competitiveness Council is taking place in Brussels on 26th May-27th May. I will be representing the UK on day one (internal market and industry) with Shan Morgan (deputy permanent representative to the EU) representing the UK on day two (research and innovation)

The Dutch presidency is seeking a new approach with the Telecoms Council and Internal Market discussion of Competitiveness Council being split over one day, with a joint lunch in-between. This is designed to bring greater coherence between the two Councils given their joint interests on the digital single market. Ed Vaizey will be representing the UK at the Telecoms Council which is the subject of a separate statement.

#### *Day One*

There are two legislative items on the agenda for the internal market and industry discussion. First the Commission will be seeking a general approach on the portability proposal, which is aimed at ensuring the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market. Secondly there is the first reading of the proposal to amend the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services directive.

The non-legislative items on the agenda are the adoption and debate of two sets of Council conclusions on better regulation and digitisation of industry. There is a presentation

from the Commission, followed by an exchange of views on the competitiveness 'check-up' state of play of the real economy.

Other business items on the agenda are the first reading of the e-commerce package, readout from the recent Friends of Industry meeting in Warsaw, information from the presidency on the quantum technology conference, information on high performance computing and big data enabled applications, and information from the Slovak presidency on their upcoming EU presidency priorities.

Our objectives for day one of the Competitiveness Council:

To secure a general approach on the portability regulation that will ensure consumers benefit from access to digital content purchased in their home country when travelling within the Union, without introducing excessive burdens to businesses that supply such services; and

To secure ambitious language in the presidency conclusions that is in line with our better regulation priorities.

#### *Day Two*

Day two will see the Minister for Universities and Science confirming three sets of Council conclusions.

The negotiated conclusion on FP7 (7th Framework Programme For Research and technological development) and future outlook is in line with the UK position.

It recognises FP7 has contributed to the competitiveness of Europe's industry and has strengthened scientific excellence.

The findings of the evaluation are an important consideration for the UK presidency priorities, on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and ideas for the next programme after that.

The UK supports the conclusions on research and innovation-friendly regulation as they emphasise the potential impact of EU policy-making on innovation.

The UK is content with the negotiated conclusion on open science as it is in line with UK open science policy.

Under other business items there will be presentations on the 2016 ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures) roadmap, the work programme of the incoming Slovakian presidency, and information from the Commission on the European Innovation Council.

[HCWS7]



# ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 24 May 2016

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