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**20 February 2023**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 20 February 2023**

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# HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. RISHI SUNAK, MP, OCTOBER 2022)

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§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 19 DECEMBER 2019]

### FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 728

FIFTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2022-2023

## House of Commons

*Monday 20 February 2023*

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

### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### MEMBER SWORN

**Mr Speaker:** I understand that the hon. Member for Stafford wishes to take the oath to the King, as she was unable to do so earlier.

*Theo Clarke took and subscribed the Oath.*

### NEW MEMBER

*The following Member took and subscribed the Oath required by law:*

Ashley Dalton, for West Lancashire.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Residential Buildings: Remediation

1. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on cladding and non-cladding remediation for residential buildings. [903613]

5. **Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure that residents are adequately protected from increases in insurance premiums caused by remedial works. [903617]

12. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help protect leaseholders in low-rise apartment blocks from increases in building insurance costs caused by cladding issues. [903626]

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** It is wonderful to see such a strong contingent from Lancashire in the Gallery. Skelmersdale and Ormskirk will be proud of their new MP, I am sure.

Developers are lining up to sign our contract to remediate approximately 1,500 buildings. Some 95% of those buildings with the most dangerous Grenfell-style cladding have already been remediated or have work under way. The number of buildings that are being fixed by the building safety fund has doubled in the past year. The pilot for our new mid-rise scheme is making good progress ahead of its full opening in the coming months.

**Mr Dhese:** Even after the horrors of the Grenfell tragedy in 2017, the Government have failed abysmally to get to grips with the cladding scandal. While the Government dither and developers delay, the leaseholders of potentially dangerously clad apartments are stuck in limbo. Many, including people living in West Central in Slough constituency, and in other blocks, cannot sell or remortgage their apartments, and many face ever-rising service charges and other charges that they cannot now meet. Does the Secretary of State think it is fair for my Slough constituents to have to continue to suffer intolerably under such dire and demoralising conditions?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the plight of his constituents, but the action we have already taken will ensure not only that the ultimate owners of those buildings—whether that is the

developers or the freeholders—are responsible for remediation, but that those leaseholders who are currently trapped and unable to move will be able to do so and to secure a mortgage on their property if required.

**Dame Meg Hillier:** I declare an interest: I live in a block with cladding. There are many real concerns, and I commend the Secretary of State for some of the progress he has begun to make, but there is still a big issue with insurance premiums that are way too high for the risk involved. Will he update the House on what progress he has made with the insurance industry to get premiums down?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Not only have insurance premiums been too high, but some of the middle people involved have been gouging at the expense of leaseholders. We have made it clear that there are responsibilities on the Association of British Insurers and others to change their ways. The Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), is responsible for local government and engaged in work to make progress on that.

**Mike Kane:** My constituent Joanne Davies faces a nightmare scenario. In a few weeks' time, she will have to fork out £5,000 because of regulatory change in the light of Grenfell. She gets no support because she lives in a low-rise block. Will the Minister meet me to discuss her case?

**Michael Gove:** I will absolutely make sure that I or another Minister meets the hon. Gentleman and takes up the case of his constituent, yes.

**Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** Does the Secretary of State recognise that issues like the cladding scandal being foisted on innocent leaseholders will continue until there is fundamental reform of the leasehold system? I know he has plans to do that. When does he think they might be put into effect?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We hope, in the forthcoming King's Speech, to introduce legislation to fundamentally reform the system. Leaseholders, not just in this case but in so many other cases, are held to ransom by freeholders. We need to end this feudal form of tenure and ensure individuals have the right to enjoy their own property fully.

#### **Levelling-up and Town Centre Funding: Gillingham and Rainham**

2. **Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con):** What levelling-up funding and town centre funding has been provided to Gillingham and Rainham constituency. [903614]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** I am grateful for the question from my hon. Friend, who is a great champion for his constituency. He will know that his constituency has benefited from nearly £5 million of levelling-up funding since 2020, including £4 million from the Getting Building fund for the redevelopment

of Britton Farm and the Connecting Rural Kent and Medway project, and £600,000 from the community renewal fund for the Medway Together project. His constituency will also benefit from £3.3 million that Medway Council was allocated from the UK shared prosperity fund.

**Rehman Chishti:** I thank the Minister for that answer, but it was for the wider Medway. I think Gillingham received £2 million with regard to the Britton Farm skills hub.

Having worked very closely with Medway Council to put forward an outstanding bid for Gillingham Open Lines, covering an area with high levels of deprivation, I was disappointed to see that application turned down. It raises real concerns about fairness and a merit-based system of government, which the Prime Minister assured me would be the case. Will the Minister visit Gillingham with me and meet stakeholders to look at—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Please, there are a lot of people on the Order Paper who I want to get in. Let us help each other. If somebody does not want to get in, please tell me and then we can help each other.

**Dehenna Davison:** I will, of course, visit my hon. Friend's constituency again, after a fantastic visit just a few months ago. I should really reiterate that all the funds in the Department are distributed fairly and objectively, and that different allocation methods are used for each fund to ensure that funding reaches those who most need it, but of course I will meet him to discuss his own project further.

**Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab):** I commiserate with the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) and the people of Gillingham and Rainham for feeling let down. The Tory Mayor of the West Midlands went further. He said, after the disappointing results for his area—including Druids Heath in my constituency, one of the most deprived parts of the country—that it was time to end this “begging bowl culture”. Does the Minister agree?

**Dehenna Davison:** I am sure the hon. Member will be very, very pleased to read the funding simplification plan we will be publishing in due course.

#### **Rent Controls: Local Government**

3. **Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab):** If he will give local government powers to set rent controls. [903615]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** The Government do not support the introduction of rent controls in the private rental sector. Evidence suggests that they discourage investment, lead to declining property standards and may encourage illegal sub-letting, which would help neither tenants nor landlords.

**Nadia Whittome:** In September last year, a survey by the tenants' union ACORN found that 48% of private renters had received a rent hike from their landlord since January 2021. Some increases were as high as 67%. In a cost of living crisis, that is fuelling poverty and homelessness. Will the Government act now to freeze rents, allowing vital breathing room while more permanent solutions to tackle spiralling housing costs are devised?

**Felicity Buchan:** In the UK, rent increased by 4.4% in the year to January 2023. We are clearly aware that there is a lot of pressure on household budgets, which is why the Treasury put together an enormous £37 billion cost of living package in 2022-23. A further £26 billion will be available in the coming year.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): More than 40 households have been served with a section 21 notice every single day since the Government first announced their intention to scrap such notices. That is a total of nearly 53,000 households, and the number is rising. I must sound like a broken gramophone record, but the situation out there, in the real world, is desperate for so many people at the sharp end of the private rented sector. The Opposition are ready to support them. Enough of the talking: when can we finally expect the Government's renters reform Bill to be put to the House?

**Felicity Buchan:** The Government have a manifesto commitment to abolish section 21, and we will do so as soon as parliamentary time allows. We have just finished the consultation on the decent homes standard, which concluded in mid-October. It is important that we get this legislation right, and we intend to do so.

#### **Trading Standards: Staffing and Resources**

4. **John Penrose** (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact of variations in staffing and resources on the effectiveness of local trading standards teams. [903616]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):** As my hon. Friend will know, local authorities are responsible for determining resourcing priorities in accordance with the needs of their local electorates, and the members of those electorates will differ according to the areas where they live. That said, the local government finance settlement for 2023-24 makes available up to £60 billion for local government in England in response to the requests of the sector, and the majority of that funding is ringfenced in recognition of the fact that local authorities are best placed to understand the priorities.

**John Penrose:** There is a widespread concern that some local trading standards teams are no longer capable of protecting local citizens from scams, fraud and rip-offs, or of delivering the strong and fair competition locally which will ultimately be the only route for levelling up jobs, exports and growth in left-behind communities. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the proposals for minimum standards in my Government-commissioned report "Power to the people", so that we can level up opportunities in communities throughout the country?

**Lee Rowley:** I have read that report, and I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend to talk more about this important issue, in which I know he has a long-standing interest.

#### **Local Planning Authorities: Land for Employment and Industrial Use**

6. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the provision of land for employment and industrial use by local planning authorities. [903618]

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** National planning policy makes it clear that local plans and decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and, most importantly, create jobs and life opportunities. We are consulting on how the national planning policy framework could better support these developments, and we welcome contributions to that consultation.

**Mark Pawsey:** And I welcome my hon. Friend to her new position.

The businesses and jobs of the future will need modern premises from which to operate. In my constituency, Rugby Borough Council recently agreed to review its local plan emphasising the provision of more land for employment to help levelling up and to create jobs and opportunities. What further support and incentives can the Department give local authorities such as Rugby which are seeking to do the right thing and enable our businesses to grow?

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. We are delighted to see ambitious local authorities such as Rugby, which he doubtless champions on behalf of his constituents, promoting the development that will help to level up his area. We are therefore creating a new framework to make local plans easier to produce, and they will be given more weight in decision making so that we can create certainty and foster a genuinely plan-led system.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When land is available for urban development, external partners of local authorities often determine the future economic strategy for locations such as my constituency. How is the Department ensuring that there is a focus on a levelling-up agenda that benefits local communities, as opposed to a trickle-down agenda that benefits only the investors' interests?

**Rachel Maclean:** The hon. Lady will know that the Government are committed to levelling up areas throughout the country, including her constituency. Working with Homes England, we deliver significant investment funds to enable York and other partners to deliver homes and, more importantly, places that people will want to come to, in order to drive all-important economic growth and level up the country.

#### **Statutory Public Consultations**

7. **Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of statutory public consultations to local decision making. [903619]

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** Meaningful engagement with local communities is essential to the improvement of public services, and our reforms in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will strengthen



community engagement in planning and increase the opportunities for engagement through the development of digital services.

**Gareth Bacon:** I thank my hon. Friend and welcome her back to her well-deserved place on the Treasury Bench. Would she agree that the Mayor of London's decision to go ahead with the expansion of the ultra low emission zone despite overwhelming opposition to the scheme expressed in a public consultation shows complete contempt for the people of outer London? Would she further agree that what appears to be a clear attempt by Transport for London to interfere with the outcome of the consultation in order to predetermine the result further undermines the democratic process?

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank my hon. Friend for his vital question. I have seen the reports he refers to and I totally share his concerns about the consultation process led by the Mayor of London. Clearly these plans will have a significant impact on the communities that my hon. Friend represents so ably, which is why we must get to the bottom of what happened and hold the Mayor of London to account.

### Levelling-up Missions

8. **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of progress in meeting the levelling-up missions. [903620]

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** We are advancing on all fronts, rolling out deeper and broader devolution across England, allocating extra resource to the poorest regions and taking steps to enhance productivity everywhere. In Portsmouth, £20 million has already been received through the levelling-up fund to transform the visitor economy, and nearly £7 million has been allocated from the future high streets fund. Portsmouth is also receiving £48 million as part of the national bus strategy.

**Stephen Morgan:** The Government promised that their levelling up plans would provide much-needed funding to communities such as my own, but last month Portsmouth South was once again deprived of funding that would have revitalised our city centre. Having rejected a bid twice, can the Minister confirm what action the Government are now taking to make Portsmouth city centre a place that local people can be proud of once again?

**Michael Gove:** I think we can all be proud of Portsmouth city centre, the visitor attractions and the historic communities that the hon. Gentleman is so fortunate to represent. I look forward to working with Gerald Vernon-Jackson and others like him across the party divide in local government in Portsmouth to ensure that the next bid can be successful.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): On the subject of the next bid, my right hon. Friend will know that we are very disappointed in Lichfield that after two bids we were not awarded any grant to help with the leisure centre, but does he agree that an application for Burntwood, an ex-mining town in the Lichfield constituency, might be more successful?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is a brilliant advocate for Lichfield. It may well be that his impassioned advocacy for the community that he has come to call Lich Vegas has meant that bids for the leisure centre might have been seen as *de trop*, but Burntwood certainly seems to be one of the communities that would be a prime candidate. I took the opportunity when I was in the west midlands recently to visit Willenhall to see how the levelling up fund was helping to transform communities there. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) has done an amazing job in making sure that communities that have been overlooked and undervalued for years are at last getting the investment they need. That is levelling up in action.

### Levelling-up Fund Round 2

9. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the levelling-up funding allocated in the second round. [903621]

19. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the geographical spread of the funding awarded in the second round of the levelling-up fund. [903633]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** The second round of the levelling-up fund will invest up to £2.1 billion in 111 vital local infrastructure projects. We prioritised investment in high-quality bids in places that have not previously received levelling-up fund money in order to maximise the spread of overall funding from rounds 1 and 2. In this round of the fund, two thirds of the funding went to those places in the greatest need, which we designated as category 1. In Scotland, across both rounds, the amount of money awarded exceeded our public funding commitments.

**Alison Thewliss:** The Earl of Rosebery said at the opening of the People's Palace and Winter Gardens 125 years ago that they would be "open to the people for ever and ever".

The M8 motorway driven through the centre of Glasgow was called the "scar that will never heal".

Can the Minister tell me why Glasgow's bids to address both of those issues were rejected in a process that she has already admitted to Members of this House was rigged?

**Dehenna Davison:** I ask the hon. Lady to retract that statement, because in no way have I said that the process was rigged. It absolutely was not. The decision-making framework that we use was outlined in full, in writing, in the technical note that we published, and I would be happy to send her a link to it on gov.uk. She has raised the question of the People's Palace, and I would be happy to sit down with her to talk about the bid once she has received the written feedback, to see if we can strengthen it for any future funding rounds, potentially including round 3 of the levelling-up fund, which will be announced in due course.

**Peter Aldous:** Projects to protect coastal communities against erosion and flooding bring significant economic and social benefits on their own. Can my hon. Friend

therefore review the investment criteria for round 3 of the levelling-up fund to include stand-alone coastal defence schemes that are not part of a wider transport regeneration or cultural bid?

**Dehenna Davison:** My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion not only for the east of England but, in particular, for coastal communities. We know that coastal communities add unique value to our country and offer significant growth potential, which is why 22 coastal areas are benefiting from more than £673 million of investment via the towns fund, why eight English freeports are in coastal areas and why coastal areas such as Ramsgate continue to benefit from the levelling-up fund, but of course I will be happy to meet him to discuss this further.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It was not just councils that put time and money into these bids; local people put their heart and soul into developing their community's submissions, only to find that their bid would never have been allowed to win, that their time had been wasted and that they had been taken for fools. The Minister does not seem troubled about wasting Members' time, and certainly not local authorities' time, but surely she will apologise to those volunteers.

**Dehenna Davison:** I have already expressed my admiration for the incredible work put in by local government officials, volunteers and Members across the House, and I have apologised—the hon. Gentleman can read the Select Committee transcript for himself.

I need to make the point that we had £8.8 billion-worth of bids for round 3 of the levelling-up fund and only £2.1 billion to allocate, which unfortunately means difficult decisions had to be made. We are not a Government who shy away from making difficult decisions, and my own county council unfortunately faced a detriment, too. Ultimately, in line with the decision-making framework outlined in the technical note, we were keen to ensure geographic spread so that the most areas possible benefited from the levelling-up fund across rounds 1 and 2.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Minister gave assurances in Westminster Hall less than two weeks ago that unsuccessful local authorities would receive feedback and their scorings. Local authorities are now being told that they will not receive their scorings. Why has that decision been taken?

**Dehenna Davison:** As I outlined in the Westminster Hall debate, local authorities will receive detailed feedback on their specific bids in due course. Some areas have already received feedback, and it will be rolled out further in the weeks to come.

**Chris Stephens:** Let me recap, then. As the Minister admitted in Westminster Hall, councils that received money in round 1 were told at the very end of the process that they would not receive money at the end of round 2, despite the many hours that officials had spent putting bids together. We are now being told that councils will no longer receive their scorings. What confidence

can local authorities have that this process is fair and transparent? Or is it simply the case that this policy is in tatters and no faith can be placed in this process?

**Dehenna Davison:** I would ask the hon. Gentleman to visit some of the areas that are benefiting from the levelling-up fund. He should visit some of the incredible projects that are benefiting local communities and then look me in the eye and tell me that this policy is in tatters.

### Metro Mayors: Transfer of Powers

10. **Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): If he will make an assessment of the potential benefits of transferring powers from central Government to (a) the Mayor of Greater Manchester and (b) other metro Mayors. [903624]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** Devolution gives local leaders the tools to level up. Mayors already drive economic growth, improve public services and respond to local priorities, which is why the Government are committed to deepening the devolution settlement for the most mature institutions, supported by stronger processes for accountability. The west midlands and Greater Manchester trailblazer deals will act as a blueprint for other areas.

**Sir James Duddridge:** Devolving powers seems like such a great idea, but is the Minister as concerned as I am that Mayors like Andy Burnham are using the role to build a personal power base and to implement policies, such as the so-called Manchester clean-air zone, that are diametrically opposed to Conservative values?

**Dehenna Davison:** I thank my hon. Friend for staying vigilant on the creation of socialist power bases, which those of us on the Government side of the House take incredibly seriously. I believe that levelling up this country by devolving power is the best way to champion the Conservative values and principles of entrepreneurialism, innovation and individualism. As I have already outlined, this will happen alongside a deepened accountability framework.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The trailblazer deals in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester imply that everyone else will have to sit and wait, and not get extra devolution. Will the Minister disabuse me of that by setting out a timetable—nothing in her response indicates a timetable—for when the Mayors of other combined authorities will be given the same powers as Greater Manchester and the West Midlands?

**Dehenna Davison:** Our priority at the moment is securing these trailblazer deals—securing the devolution of vital powers on things we know really matter to communities in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. Following that point, we will be talking to other metro areas about how we can deepen their devolution deals as well.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): Does the Minister share my concern about the Mayor of Greater Manchester's proposals for a workplace parking levy? It is a tax on business, jobs and families, is it not?

**Dehenna Davison:** My hon. Friend is a great champion for his community and I would be happy to meet him to discuss this policy further.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Minister knows that I am very supportive of the devolution of more powers to Greater Manchester, but one area that she needs to look at carefully is the increase in scrutiny that will be necessary at a very local level. As powers shift from this place, where scrutiny is strong, to local government, where scrutiny is not as strong as it perhaps ought to be, we need to look afresh at those powers.

**Dehenna Davison:** I could not agree with the hon. Gentleman more on that point. If powers are being handed to local areas, which I think we all agree is right, it is important that that comes with a proper scrutiny framework. That is why we will shortly be publishing a detailed devolution accountability framework, alongside the trailblazer deals.

#### Local Authority Budgets

11. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of trends in the level of local authority budgets. [903625]

17. **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of trends in the level of local authority budgets. [903631]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):** The local government finance settlement 2023-24 recently made available nearly £60 billion of funding for local government in England in the coming financial year, responding to the requests of the sector for clarity, space and additional resources.

**Helen Morgan:** Shropshire Council has recently reported that it needs to find £10 million of cuts this quarter and £50 million in the coming years. Some 85% of its budget is spent on social care, so 97% of residents are going to pay more for reduced services. Will the Government consider reviewing the fair funding formula, so that councils in rural areas can continue to provide proper services to their constituents?

**Lee Rowley:** The main message we heard from the local government sector in the past 12 months, after covid, inflation and all the pressures it had, was that it wanted stability. What we have tried to offer as part of the financial settlement for 2023-24 is a stable platform upon which colleagues in local government can plan, reform and work through where they are going in the future.

**Munira Wilson:** Both adult and children's social care are in crisis, but the social care grant, which can be used for both, excludes from its flawed funding formula the needs of tens of thousands of vulnerable children across this country. That means that in London alone councils will miss out on some £600 million by 2025, leaving

boroughs such as mine in Richmond struggling to provide high-quality care for those children in need. Will the Minister look at fixing this faulty formula so that the most vulnerable children in our society can get the care they desperately need?

**Lee Rowley:** As I said to the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan), we are prioritising stability this year. Of course we always look at elements of the settlement and what we can or cannot do, and how we can make them better for the long term. However, substantial additional funding, support and resources are going into the local government finance settlement, which we hope will make a difference on the frontline.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): Over a decade of Tory cuts are not the only thing damaging council budgets; fly-tipping is a stain on our communities and costs nearly £400 million a year. Taxpayers are left footing the bill for the 16% increase in this crime under a Tory Government. Councils should not pay the price for Conservatives being soft on crime, so does the Minister agree that it is time to get tough on people who do not respect our neighbourhoods? Will he back Labour's plan for stronger punishment for fly-tippers and the introduction of clear-up squads?

**Lee Rowley:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments. I absolutely agree that fly-tipping is a scourge and a crime, and that local authorities have the resources and the ability to try to do this and to crack down on it. I encourage them to do so.

#### Antisocial Behaviour: Local Authorities

13. **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con): What steps he is taking to support local authorities in tackling antisocial behaviour. [903627]

18. **Kate Kniveton** (Burton) (Con): What steps he is taking to support local authorities in tackling anti-social behaviour. [903632]

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** Across Government, we are developing an action plan to tackle antisocial behaviour. We are looking at stronger enforcement and swifter justice, as well as supporting young people into sports and other activities. This action builds on our wider investment in tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, including our recruitment of an additional 20,000 police officers.

**Ian Levy:** Antisocial behaviour and petty crime have long been a problem in Blyth Valley, which is why I have been meeting the police, community groups and local retailers to try to resolve the issues. Will my right hon. Friend please agree to meet me to discuss the matter in greater detail, and hopefully find where the support is?

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely will. My hon. Friend, who is a spirited champion for the communities in Blyth Valley, recognises how important it is that we work together with other agencies to deal with antisocial behaviour, that we have swift and certain justice, and that we ensure



that perpetrators clear up the mess they have created. Above all, we have activities to intervene upstream and ensure that the persistent absentees and truants of today, who could go on to become the antisocial actors of tomorrow, are helped back on to the right path.

**Kate Kniveton:** My constituents on Ashby Road, the A511 and the former A50 trunk road, are suffering as a result of drivers racing along the road with no consideration for residents who need to pull in and out of their driveways. Excessive speed, aggressive driving habits and numerous traffic collisions are very worrying for those who live there. What support can my right hon. Friend give local authorities to help them tackle such instances of antisocial behaviour?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is quite right to raise this issue. Vehicle crime—whether those driving cars or using e-scooters in an antisocial fashion, or otherwise making life difficult for their neighbours—often needs attention. That is why an additional 231 uplift officers have been added to Staffordshire police, but I will be working with Staffordshire’s police and crime commissioner to ensure that this issue is tackled appropriately.

#### Second Homes in Coastal Areas

14. **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to address numbers of second homes in coastal areas. [903628]

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** The Government fully understand that beautiful areas attract large numbers of holidaymakers and, therefore, large numbers of second homes. That is why we have introduced higher rates of stamp duty land tax for those purchasing additional properties, which will help to support local areas that have a large number of second homes.

**Duncan Baker:** The ability to double council tax on second homes is a real step in the right direction to help communities, such as mine in North Norfolk, that suffer from a high concentration of second homes. However, clause 73 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill requires greater clarification. Currently, a district council such as North Norfolk benefits from just 8p in the pound from council tax revenue. Does the Minister agree that we ought to look at that clause and ensure that the communities affected by second homes are the ones that benefit from additional taxation raised?

**Rachel Maclean:** My hon. Friend does a superb job of representing communities affected by large numbers of second homes. That is why the new council tax second homes premium will enable councils, particularly in areas such as his with a strong tourism industry, to generate significant additional funding for local services. If they introduce the maximum premium, they will benefit from double the council tax revenue. I am happy to discuss that issue with him in more detail.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The pandemic turbocharged the housing crisis in rural areas, especially in Devon and Cornwall. Families are being turfed out of their private rented homes under section 21 notices so that they can be turned into

second homes and Airbnbs. Does the Minister agree with south-west supporters of the First Homes Not Second Homes campaign, which I run with Cornwall councillor Jayne Kirkham, that it is time not only for increased council tax on second homes but for a proper licensing regime, so that communities can decide how many second homes should be in their community, to stop them being hollowed out?

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank the hon. Member for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House on behalf of his constituents and communities. We are looking at the issue of registration of second homes through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and other frameworks. We understand that, naturally, people want to go on holiday to beautiful areas, but there is an impact on communities. We need the registration scheme so that we understand and better mitigate that.

#### Rural Areas: Housing Provision

15. **Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the provision of housing in rural areas. [903629]

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** We want to ensure that affordable homes are available to anyone who needs them, including in rural locations where stock is limited and often difficult to replace. Our £11.5 billion affordable homes programme is one of the vehicles through which rural housing is delivered. It will provide thousands of affordable homes in rural communities such as his across the country.

**Anthony Mangnall:** I wholeheartedly agree with the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker): we need to build more houses and put them in the right places and spaces, in the right style and at genuinely local affordable levels. One of the ways to do that is through community land trusts. Could the Minister outline how we can do better to support community land trusts in south Devon to build the houses that local people need, on a primary residency basis?

**Rachel Maclean:** The Government completely agree with those comments. We are clear that the community-led housing sector offers significant untapped potential for helping to meet housing need. It is the support and close involvement of the local community that helps secure that planning permission, so that we can build the homes that local people support and can afford to buy.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): May I once again welcome the new Minister to her place?

Over a quarter of a million people in rural England are on a housing waiting list, yet the Government are on course to miss even the paltry target of 13,000 new rural affordable homes set out in the current five-year affordable homes programme. At the same time, the steady erosion of our country’s social housing stock continues apace, with data released by the Department only last month making it clear that the Government presided over the

net loss of 14,110 social homes last year. Is it simply not the case that, when it comes to providing rural and urban communities with the genuinely affordable rented homes they need, Ministers are failing woefully?

**Rachel Maclean:** No, that is not the case. It is a pleasure to respond to the hon. Gentleman. This Government are taking the delivery of affordable housing across the whole country incredibly seriously. That is why more than 243,000 affordable homes have been provided in rural local authorities in England, such as those represented by Members across this House, between April 2010 and March 2022. We must get the planning system right. We have a mission to level up the country, which includes building affordable homes in rural areas, as well as in urban areas.

### Housing Developments: Primary Care Capacity

16. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on provision of primary care capacity for large-scale new housing developments. [903630]

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** New housing needs to be supported by the right infrastructure, including primary care services. The new infrastructure levy that we are introducing through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will be able to provide funding for local infrastructure and so contribute towards addressing that vital issue.

**Andrew Selous:** I am running out of ways to describe how unbelievably awful the current system is, which is failing to allocate sufficient increased general practice capacity when we build tens of thousands of new homes. Do the Government recognise the urgency of this matter? If we are going to build housing, people must be able to see a doctor when they move into their new homes.

**Rachel Maclean:** Yes, the Government do recognise the urgency of this issue, and I thank my hon. Friend for raising it. He is right to be consistent about it, because, as we recognise, access to healthcare is one of the most important concerns—if not the most important concern—of local communities when new housing is planned. Our community infrastructure levy places much firmer requirements on local planning to engage with healthcare provision in the local community, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss this matter further.

### Devolving Power to Local Communities

21. **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): What progress he has made on devolving power to local communities. [903635]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** In 2022 we signed six new devolution deals—with York and North Yorkshire, the east midlands, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cornwall, and the north-east—with £4 billion of long-term investment funding and key powers devolved to local leaders. When these deals are implemented, more than half of the English population will benefit from devolution.

**David Simmonds:** My constituents benefit from access to places such as Ruislip woods and the Pinner Memorial Park as a means of getting to green spaces in the local area. What measures does my hon. Friend have in mind to ensure that, through the access to nature target, more local authorities can use these devolution powers to create good-quality green spaces?

**Dehenna Davison:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of access to green space. My Department has made significant funds available to local areas, including through the UK shared prosperity fund and the levelling-up parks fund, which can be used to regenerate green spaces, but I would be happy to sit down with him to discuss the matter further.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm whether there is levelling-up funding within the Department that has not been spent or allocated?

**Dehenna Davison:** I am not quite sure whether I understand the hon. Lady's question. If she would like to write to me, I will certainly follow up in writing.

### Building Regulations: Energy Efficiency

22. **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): What assessment has he made of the impact on energy efficiency of the part L uplift in the building regulations. [903636]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):** The part L uplift, which came into force in June 2022, delivered a significant improvement in energy efficiency. New homes now produce 30% fewer CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and new non-domestic buildings produce 27% fewer. The uplift will act as a stepping stone to the 2025 standards, which we will consult on in due course.

**Eddie Hughes:** Is the Minister aware of a simple additive called EndoTherm, which can be added to both domestic and non-domestic wet heating systems for condensing boilers? Tests have proved that it reduces energy use and hopefully it will soon be standard assessment procedure-approved for testing. If he is not aware of it, will he meet me and Andrew Bean to discuss its properties?

**Lee Rowley:** I was not aware of it until now, but I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting it. As he knows from his time in the Department, our approach is agnostic on technology and materials, but where there are opportunities to find out more about how things are working and how we can improve things, I am happy to do so.

### Topical Questions

T1. [903638] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** I was honoured 10 days ago to have the chance to meet the family of Awaab Ishak, the child who died so tragically in horrendous circumstances in Rochdale. I was able to thank them for their campaigning work and, as a result, with co-operation



from bodies across this House, we are taking forward legislation in his name and in his honour to ensure that the scourge of damp and mould is at last effectively dealt with.

**Dan Jarvis:** In the levelling up White Paper the Government rightly confirmed that they would match European Union structural fund receipts for Cornwall. They could do the same for South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, County Durham and Lincolnshire, but so far have not. Will they?

**Michael Gove:** I think we may be arguing from slightly different premises, because it depends how one defines the replacement for EU structural funds. I am more than happy to take the hon. Gentleman through the figures and point out the ways in which the funding we have supplied through the funds at our disposal match European commitments.

T3. [903641] **Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): One issue recently discussed at the Stoke-on-Trent summit at 10 Downing Street, led by my right hon. Friend, was setting free Homes England and Stoke-on-Trent City Council on their fantastic, UK-leading strategy for the regeneration of industrial cities. Will he update the House on how his mission to set free Homes England is going to date?

**Michael Gove:** Stoke-on-Trent and all the six towns are enjoying a renaissance under this Government in a way that they did not under the last Labour Government. We are ensuring that investment is going into Burslem, Tunstall, Stoke and Hanley in a way that did not occur under that Labour Government. Homes England is at the heart of that investment, providing new homes and cultural investment and ensuring that people who voted Conservative at the last general election recognise that they made the right decision.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the shadow Secretary of State.

**Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): I wish the Secretary of State good luck with that. Last week, he told ITV News that,

“nobody will get in the way of making sure we get money to those who are vulnerable and who deserve it”.

Was he referring to the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary to the Treasury?

**Michael Gove:** Keir Starmer.

**Lisa Nandy:** Seriously, the Secretary of State no longer has the power to sign off on a park bench. There are now reports of significant underspends in his Department that are about to be clawed back by the Treasury. Can he guarantee to the towns crying out for investment in town centres, high streets and affordable housing that the full allocation of the towns fund, the future high streets fund and the affordable homes programme will be spent? If he cannot, will he tell us who is blame—him, or the Chancellor?

**Mr Speaker:** Just before the Secretary of State replies, I remind him that we should not use the name of the Member but their constituency, and also that he is certainly a right hon. Member.

**Michael Gove:** My apologies to you, Mr Speaker, and to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—the “human roadblock”, as he was once memorably described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). Returning to the issue, it is absolutely the case that this Department is responsible for the disbursement, successfully, of funds to the frontline, helping to transform communities that were overlooked and undervalued by the last Government. No one is going to get in the way of this Department spending the money we need on the communities that need it. The only thing I would say is that there is not a single spending commitment that the hon. Lady has been able to make because of the shadow Chancellor. Labour—

**Mr Speaker:** Secretary of State, I do not want to do this every time we have questions. We get to topicals, and because the question is asked you feel it is a free-for-all. It is not your questions; it is Back-Benchers’ questions. Please, let us get everybody in, and let us start with Greg Smith, who wants to ask a good question.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Whole communities have been up in arms after perverse decisions by the Planning Inspectorate, most recently on a site between Askett and Meadle and another between Twyford and Poundon. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to reform the Planning Inspectorate to stop it walking all over local wishes?

**Michael Gove:** The new national planning policy framework ensures that the Planning Inspectorate will work with, not against, local communities. The Planning Inspectorate also has a wonderful new chief executive officer—an official from my Department who helped to deliver the homes for Ukraine programme and understands what communities need and want.

T2. [903639] **Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): With around 1,000 jobs and 17,000 placements at stake in Northern Ireland, the shared prosperity fund is too little, too late for those organisations that are currently availing themselves of European social fund support. Can the Minister ensure that, at the very least, decisions on funding will be taken before the end of March to allow successful bids to continue without interruption?

**Michael Gove:** We will do everything we can to expedite that funding to Northern Ireland.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Solar is an important part of the UK’s energy mix, and, as the Secretary of State will know, the sun always shines in Shropshire. Does he agree that solar farms, which are often of huge scale, need to be in the right place, not the wrong place? So often, a lot of good agricultural land is lost.

**Michael Gove:** Shropshire, home to the “blue remembered hills” of A. E. Housman, is one of our most beautiful counties. It is vital, even as we pursue renewable energy across the United Kingdom, that we recognise that our environment is just as much about natural beauty as it is about striving towards net zero.

T4. [903643] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): According to the Government's own reports, the Prime Minister's Richmondshire local authority is the 67th least deprived local authority in the country, while Bradford is the 21st most deprived. Was levelling up at the heart of the Government's decision to approve roughly £20 million of funding for Richmondshire and no funding for my constituency of Bradford South?

**Michael Gove:** That money went towards ensuring that service families get the accommodation and support they deserve. If Labour wants to be taken seriously as a patriotic party, it should stop talking down our armed forces and ensure that they receive the money they deserve.

**Simon Jupp** (East Devon) (Con): Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset secured £152 million from the levelling-up fund last month. The four counties make up the region's new powerhouse, the great south west, of which I chair the all-party parliamentary group. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the fantastic opportunities that lie ahead for the great south west?

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely will, and I will make sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), is with me as well. There is nothing that the two of us enjoy more than hearing good news from fantastic constituency MPs such as my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Simon Jupp).

**Mr Speaker:** Let us hear from another: I call Emma Lewell-Buck.

T5. [903644] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Not only have the Government legislated to allow sewage on to our beaches and into our sea, but they are now limiting funds for local authorities to stop historic coastal landfill sites polluting our coast. One of those sites is in gorgeous South Shields. When can we expect the Government to do something about it?

**Michael Gove:** Actually, the way that this Government have handled Ofwat has ensured that we have done more to improve water quality—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Lady were to ask the chief executive of any water company about the toughest Environment Secretary that they have had to deal with, they would know. But anyway, on the key question of South Shields, I agree that it is beautiful, and I will have the chance to visit soon. The additional money that we are making available for the devolution deal for the north-east should help, but I would be delighted to visit and find out more.

**Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): There have been multiple frivolous applications in my beautiful South West Hertfordshire constituency, including in my hometown of Tring, where such applications would increase the population by 30%. What advice can the Secretary of State give me on how best to engage with his Department on these issues so that my constituents' voices are heard clearly?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that the new Minister of State for housing and planning, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch

(Rachel Maclean), will be meeting him shortly. It is absolutely vital that communities in the suburban green belt such as his have the opportunity to ensure that people have the new homes that they need and that we preserve the communities that make his constituency so attractive to so many.

T6. [903646] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Around one in 10 owners relinquishing animals to the Dogs Trust cites housing issues as the reason. Can the Minister confirm that planned measures to protect pet ownership in the renters' reform Bill will be maintained to prevent further pets from being given up unnecessarily?

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): Fisherman's Green has been identified by the local council as a potential housing development site in Eastbourne. Local people do not support that, and I support them. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the council, which owns the land and has put the site into the strategy, can take Fisherman's Green out of the strategy without sanction?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. I have been taking a close interest in the activities of Eastbourne Borough Council. The decision to develop Fisherman's Green is the council's alone, so the council could easily take it out—the changes that we have made in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill would allow it to do that. I am afraid that there has been a campaign of dissimulation on the part of her local council; it is a case of Lib Dems spinning here.

T7. [903647] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the leaders and elected Mayor of the north-east's authorities on their work with the Government to secure a strong devolution deal? As his work concludes with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, can he confirm that he will move quickly to work with those north-east authorities to convey "trailblazer" status and powers, as agreed in the deal?

**Michael Gove:** I could not agree more that the north-east is on the up. Newcastle and Sunderland are doing well in footballing terms, but even better in political terms, thanks to the leadership of local figures, who are uniting with central Government to deliver devolution.

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): Antisocial behaviour is causing misery for my constituents, as I can tell from responses to my survey. Does the Secretary of State therefore welcome the stronger action that we have seen from Staffordshire police since its new local policing model was introduced last June? In the last month, that action has included a closure notice in Knutton, working with Asda to stop boy racers in the Wolstanton car park, and a section 34 order in Chesterton. It is a big issue, but we are moving in the right direction.

**Michael Gove:** Staffordshire's police and crime commissioner is certainly moving in the right direction, as is Staffordshire police, supported ably by my hon. Friend and others such as my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Kate Kniveton). Boy racers and others who

cause misery for their neighbours need to be dealt with effectively. That is happening in Staffordshire and should be happening more broadly as well.

**Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op):** Many constituents are contacting me about the rental market; I am sure it is the same across the country. The shortage of available properties is making it hard for private renters who are seeking accommodation. One constituent emailed to say that she had been told to keep requests to a minimum if she wanted to have a chance of getting a property. What will the Secretary of State do about the frankly disgraceful emails that tenants are receiving from letting agents?

**Michael Gove:** There are challenges in the private rented sector and with housing supply everywhere. I would say two things: first, we need to work together to unlock additional supply, which is why it is important for the Mayor of London—I am not criticising him—to play his part; secondly, we need to ensure that renters have the protections that they deserve. That is why we are bringing forward legislation, which I know the hon. Lady supports.

**Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con):** The Help to Buy scheme has helped hundreds of my young constituents to get on to the housing ladder, yet it is due to end shortly. Can the Secretary of State assure me that he is badgering the Chancellor to ensure that that vital scheme continues?

**Michael Gove:** I do not need to badger the Chancellor; we are not just constituency neighbours, but brothers from different mothers. More than that, the newly appointed Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), was immediately on the case. We will secure an extension to make sure that my hon. Friend's constituents get the benefits from the scheme that they deserve, and I look forward to meeting him next month.

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** Does the Government's commitment to look at helping blocks below 11 metres with cladding apply not only where that cladding is found to be dangerous and needs to be removed, but where lenders are still demanding EWS1 certificates, which cannot currently be provided?

**Michael Gove:** Let me look into the specifics of any individual case. It should be the case, however—as the conversations that the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), has had with lenders show—that there has been a significant diminution in the demand for EWS1 forms. Where they are still being demanded, however, I would like to know more, so I look forward to working with the right hon. Gentleman to find out more about any kinks in the system.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** On-street parking is a policy of Warwickshire County Council. Does the Secretary of State agree that the council has got it wrong in allowing people who drive internal combustion engines to park all day directly in front of the electric vehicle chargers that it has provided?

**Michael Gove:** I will have to look closely at that. It is rare that Warwickshire gets things wrong, in my experience, but my hon. Friend seems to have identified an anomaly that stands in the way of the effective transition to electric vehicles, so I look forward to considering more closely the issue that he raises.

**Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** How can taking away £25 million from Halton Borough Council over the next three years be classed as levelling up? For Cheshire West and Chester Council, it is nearly half a billion pounds since 2010. That is not levelling up. When can we expect a genuine, fair funding review?

**Michael Gove:** It is the case that at the last spending review, we secured a significant increase in local government spending, and as my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire pointed out when we had the debate on the local government finance settlement, authorities such as that of the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) have received the funding they need in order to deliver the services on which constituents rely.

**Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** Does the Secretary of State agree that when we build thousands of new homes, we need to do as well at providing extra general practice capacity as we do at providing extra primary school places? If he does, what will he do about it?

**Michael Gove:** I do, and our new infrastructure levy in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill is designed to do just that. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and with the new Minister of State for Housing and Planning, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch, in order to make sure that the infrastructure levy delivers as we both would want.

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** While people in Levenmouth certainly welcome the fact that the levelling-up process gave us some of our own money back again, can the Secretary of State identify a single measure of need or deprivation by which the Prime Minister's constituency is as needy and as deprived as the Levenmouth area in my constituency, and more deprived than the entire city of Glasgow?

**Michael Gove:** First, as I mentioned earlier, the reason that money has gone to the Prime Minister's constituency is that it is going to help service families who do so much in order to make sure that we are all kept safe and protected. Secondly, I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that it is a good thing that the UK Government are distributing this money in this way. It is the case that his party used to oppose that, but we are now delivering that money; for two successive years, cash has been delivered to Glenrothes, to Glasgow, and to other communities.

The third thing I would say is that I hope the hon. Gentleman is not the SNP MP quoted in *The Times* at the weekend as saying that the thing about the Scottish Government is that they cannot even—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Richard Foord.

**Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD):** The latest round of levelling-up funding has once again failed to provide much-needed investment in my part of Devon. The proposals put forward by East Devon

District Council would have funded vital investment in Seaton and Axminster. What does the Secretary of State say to people in towns that are attractive to tourists, who feel taken for granted and feel that this Government are not serious about levelling up for them?

**Michael Gove:** I say, “Vote Conservative,” because with a Conservative MP such as my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Simon Jupp), you have an effective advocate who can work with central Government in order to deliver.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): More people rent privately in my constituency than own their own homes, and more people rent socially than both of those groups combined. When I visit those people, week in and week out, they are massively overcrowded with no prospect of renting in the private sector or buying. What is the Secretary of State doing to deliver properly affordable social rented housing?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady’s point is very similar to that made earlier by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), and my answer is also very similar: we need to work with the Mayor of London, who has clear responsibilities in this area. Once again, I am not criticising him, but I am stressing that the delivery of so much of the funding required to improve housing in the capital depends on effective action by the Mayor.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): Some of the Homes for Ukraine six-month placements are now starting to come to an end, and some Ukrainian nationals in my constituency cannot get into private rented accommodation because they have no credit history. The local council is ready to look at rematching families, but if that does not work out, some of those Ukrainian refugees will have no choice but to present as homeless. Will the Secretary of State look at this issue, and look at the suggestion of a guarantor system backed by the Government?

**Michael Gove:** That is actually a very fair and constructive point. Making sure that there are not just banking facilities, but the kinds of guarantees that the hon. Lady asks for, is something we have been looking at in the past. I will ask the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), to talk to the hon. Lady and to St Albans council in order to make sure that the generosity of her constituents is not undermined by the activity of the financial sector.

**Mr Speaker:** That completes questions. Will those who wish to leave before we start the urgent question please do so?



## Knowsley Incident

3.34 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Before we come to the urgent question, I wish to make a short statement. I understand that at least one individual has been charged following the incident at Knowsley. Once charges are brought, the case in question is covered by the House's sub judice resolution and should not be referred to. However, I accept that there are important wider implications raised by the events in Knowsley, and I am prepared for the House to discuss them, but I request that Members do not refer to any specific cases where charges have been brought.

**Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the wider implications of the violent incident in Knowsley on Friday 10 February 2023.

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** The incident at the asylum accommodation centre in Knowsley on 10 February was totally unacceptable. As the Home Secretary and I have repeatedly made clear, there is never any excuse for violence. A substantial police response was deployed to the incident, and I offer my thanks to the officers involved on the night and subsequently for their service. A number of arrests were made, and the police investigation is ongoing. The Home Office remains in close contact with Merseyside police.

The Home Office takes its responsibilities to those in temporary asylum accommodation and to local communities extremely seriously. Alongside the police and Home Office accommodation providers, we are closely monitoring the situation around the country and the activities of relevant groups. Security at our accommodation sites has been enhanced and is kept under constant review.

We will always defend the right to peaceful protest and freedom of speech, but we will not tolerate violence, intimidation or attacks on the police. The police have a range of powers to deal with unlawful behaviour, and anyone taking part in criminal activity can and should expect the full force of the law. I have met senior Home Office officials and the police to discuss the lessons to be learned from this and other incidents and to ensure that appropriate steps are being taken.

The unprecedented number of illegal, unnecessary and dangerous small boat crossings has pushed our asylum system to breaking point. We share the frustrations of the British public about the abuse of our generosity by human traffickers and illegal migrants, who are leaving the evidently safe France and entering our country in flagrant breach of our laws. Just as everyone has the duty to obey the law, they have the right to expect that the law, including our immigration laws, will be enforced.

The enduring solution is to break the business model of the evil people smugglers and to stop the boats. The system we will build is one where if someone comes here illegally via a safe country, they will not have a route to life in the UK, and we will bring forward legislation to that effect in due course. That does not mean we are abandoning our country's instinct and history of generosity and compassion. We will continue to assist those in

genuine need of our protection. To do that, we must address illegal migration, and that is what this Government's reforms will do.

**Sir George Howarth:** May I begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for contacting me following the appalling incident that occurred on 10 February at a demonstration outside a hotel in Knowsley? A further smaller scale demonstration took place on Friday evening. The scenes that unfolded were truly shocking, with three people, one of whom was a police officer, receiving minor injuries and a police vehicle being vandalised and set on fire. I should point out that the demonstration was attended by a substantial number of residents, many of whom conducted themselves peacefully and lawfully. Unfortunately, some did not, as the number of arrests regrettably illustrates. This is not, however, typical of the people of Knowsley or Kirkby, who are not bigoted, racist or unwelcoming.

I do have concerns, as the Minister is aware, about the involvement of far-right groups from outside of Knowsley, such as Patriotic Alternative, Yorkshire Rose and Britain First, in promoting that event and seeking to stir up racial hatred in our community and others.

Before concluding I would like to put some questions to the Minister. First, does he share my concern about the involvement of those far-right groups in such incidents, and will he consider proscribing them? Secondly, will the Minister undertake an urgent review of the use of hotels to house refugees and report back to the House? Thirdly, as part of such a review, will the Minister look at alternatives to hotels, taking into account the housing needs of local residents, and work with local councils to arrive at more suitable options? Will the Minister agree to meet me and officials from Knowsley to discuss what can be done to address the local situation?

Fourthly, can the Minister at some point make a further statement to the House about how the Government propose to fix the asylum system? Finally, does the Minister agree with me that in these circumstances, some social media sites are used as platforms for poison and misinformation? Will he urge the companies that own them to ensure that the platforms are used more responsibly?

**Robert Jenrick:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the experienced and measured manner in which he has led his community in recent days. I associate myself with his remarks regarding the people of Knowsley.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that a number of groups have been involved in the protest in his constituency, as well as those elsewhere in the country, and that the behaviour of those groups is at times disgraceful and vile, and should be stamped out. We have been monitoring those groups closely, and I have asked my officials at the Home Office and police colleagues, including the National Police Co-ordination Centre, to continue doing so and to step up that activity. If we need to take further action against those groups, we will. We will be monitoring them very closely, including the social media content that they and their supporters are perpetuating.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the social media companies and their involvement in such activities. There have been some vile posts in recent days, including some about Members of this House, for

[Robert Jenrick]

no good reason. Again, we are monitoring that social media content; we raise it with the police and they raise it with social media companies through the appropriate channels.

With regard to accommodation more broadly, none of us wants to see hotels being used in this manner on an ongoing basis. They are an emergency, temporary solution to a serious national emergency. The number of individuals crossing the channel illegally in recent years has been on such a scale that the Home Office had to resort to options that are clearly undesirable.

The Prime Minister set out at the end of last year our intention to end the use of hotels as swiftly as possible. Better forms of accommodation will include dispersal accommodation, where we work closely and constructively with local authorities—including that of the right hon. Member for Knowsley—to find suitable properties, consult the local community and then house asylum seekers for as long as is necessary. That plan is now moving forward, and we have reached regional agreements with local authorities. It is for the Home Office and those local authorities to ensure that it is implemented as swiftly as possible.

More broadly, as I said in my opening remarks, hotels are a symptom of the problem. The cause is the number of people crossing the channel. That will be resolved only by breaking the business model of the people smugglers and deterring those people from crossing the channel. It is for that reason that we will bring forward further legislation very soon.

**Sir Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): The Minister, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister are all doing everything they can to stop this sort of incident from happening elsewhere. It must not happen in places such as Herefordshire. Can the Minister explain why the permanent secretary is still in post, and why no small boats Bill has appeared before the House?

**Robert Jenrick:** On the legislation that I have mentioned, the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and I are working closely as we finalise those plans. It is absolutely right that we take time to ensure that this legislation is as effective as possible. As my hon. Friend knows, this is one of the most litigious areas of public life. It is an area where, I am afraid, human rights lawyers abuse and exploit our laws at times, and where the courts have taken an expansive approach in the past. That is why we must get this right, but we will be bringing forward that legislation very soon.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Home Secretary.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The scenes outside the Suites Hotel in Knowsley 10 days ago—violence, intimidation and a police van smashed up and set on fire—were appalling and shameful, and all of us should support Merseyside police in its response to keep people safe. It comes just a few months after the appalling terrorist attack at Dover, when someone who had been engaging with far-right and extremist groups online attempted to use a petrol bomb on a centre. In the last year, the number of so-called migrant hunts organised by far-right groups has doubled, and

there has been an increase in far-right groups organising protests and intimidation and attempting to increase and inflame community tensions.

All of us have a responsibility to take this issue seriously, and there is an important debate about asylum accommodation and asylum policy. We have disagreements, and we have criticised the Home Office for the collapse in decision making on asylum, which has led to an increase in delays and in the backlog. People should not be spending a long time in hotels—they should not be put in hotels in the first place—and we should be targeting the criminal gangs, seeking new agreements with France to prevent dangerous boat crossings, and ensuring that the UK does its bit to help those who have fled persecution. We can have that debate, but we all—Government and Opposition—have a responsibility to do so calmly, with common sense, and in a way that does not inflame tensions or divide communities. The Minister will regret the fact that some of the Home Secretary's language has appeared on some of the placards. On all sides, we need to have a calm debate.

Let me ask the Minister some specific questions. What is being done to co-ordinate the monitoring of far-right activity around asylum accommodation? What is being done about the hateful extremism that has grown and that can radicalise people into violence? The former commissioner for countering extremism has said that the Government have actually reversed some of their action on this. Will he now revisit the downgrading of the response to far-right extremism as part of the Prevent strategy? Serious concerns have been raised about the links between some far-right extremist groups and people who have been exploiting these issues, as well as some links between them and National Action, which has been proscribed because it was so serious.

Does the Minister agree that, nationally, the responsibility is on all of us to be calm and to promote community cohesion and a sensible response to all the challenges we face, rather than divide and inflame tensions that the police and local communities then have to deal with?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her closing remarks. It is absolutely incumbent on all of us to treat this in a respectful and serious manner, and ensure that we do nothing to inflame tensions within our communities. I hope she will appreciate that that is the way in which I have always conducted myself in this role.

The Home Secretary has condemned unequivocally the violence we saw in Knowsley, and that is absolutely right, because there is never any excuse for violence, intimidation or attacks on the police. That does not mean that we should not seek to understand the level of public frustration that lies behind wider concerns about our asylum and immigration system. To understand is not to condone, and there are those who treat those frustrations as a phenomenon to be managed, rather than as a warning to be heeded. We in Government take the approach that this is a serious concern for the British public, and that is why we need to take all appropriate steps to stop the illegal channel crossings as quickly as possible.

On the right hon. Lady's specific questions, we are co-ordinating with police colleagues to ensure that all police forces have the correct and up-to-date advice on how they can support asylum accommodation and

manage protests should they happen in the future. The National Police Co-ordination Centre is assisting us in monitoring the activities of relevant groups, including on social media, and we will take such steps as are required if there is content that constitutes a criminal offence. We have also worked with our asylum accommodation providers to ensure that they put in place enhanced security where appropriate, and have the best possible advice from the police as to how they can protect the people working in the hotels and other centres, and, of course, the residents.

With respect to the right hon. Lady's question about the review of Prevent conducted by William Shawcross, the findings of that report were not that there were no far-right activities in this country, but that we must follow the facts and take a balanced view as to where to deploy our resources. That is exactly what we will do: we will tackle Islamist extremism with all the robustness it deserves, but we will also address far-right activity, including by the groups concerned in this protest.

**Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con):** I thank my right hon. Friend for his engagement with me on issues connected with far-right politics. Given his response to my representations, I can tell the House that his concern about these matters is genuine.

Will my right hon. Friend deconstruct the point he is making about the fact that we must tackle the organised criminal activity that sits behind all this, as that should redouble the effort to tackle detention in hotels? I have been advised by police representatives that some slave masters are targeting some of these hotels, where they try to entice young men to work on their various businesses. The suggestion that arriving here from a safe country is made illegal would drive people who arrive by small boats back into the hands of the slave masters because there would simply be no incentive for them to give themselves up to the authorities. What representations has my right hon. Friend had on those matters? Does the situation not underline the fact that we need to get the hotels emptied and the Home Office working properly?

**Robert Jenrick:** I agree that we need to ensure that the operational side of the Home Office performs, but there is no easy way to build our way out of this problem; we have to stop people crossing the channel illegally in the first place, because the numbers crossing the channel today are of an order that will always place our asylum and immigration system under enormous strain.

We are working very closely with the police and the National Crime Agency to bear down on organised immigration crime. We have doubled the budget of the NCA in that regard, and are working with it across Europe and beyond to tackle the gangs upstream in every respect. Here in the UK, we are increasing the number of immigration enforcement visits, including raids on illegal employers, by 50%. That activity started at the beginning of the year.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend's premise that if we pursue a policy like Rwanda, we will see people escaping into the broader community, although I understand where she is coming from. In fact, almost 99% of people crossing the channel in small boats are apprehended by British law enforcement authorities—mostly when we save them at sea and bring them to

Western Jet Foil and Manston—so we do meet people who arrive on our shores. The key thing is to stop them arriving in the first place.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** It is clear that putting people in hotels in this large-scale way has allowed right-wing extremist groups to target groups of vulnerable people. It is Home Office policy, therefore, that is putting people at risk—not just vulnerable asylum seekers, but our police, who have to protect everybody in such situations. Does the Minister agree that a lot more needs to be done with social media companies? He said that there is some kind of monitoring and conversations with the police regarding social media companies, but what meetings has he had directly with social media companies? It is very clear that these right-wing extremist groups are organising on social media platforms. I saw some of it myself—was offered it by an algorithm—at the weekend; I do not want to see that kind of hatred on any social media site.

Will any asylum seekers who have been badly impacted by the attack on the hotel, or who still feel at risk, have the option to be moved somewhere else where they feel safer, and will they get additional support if that is required? Will the Minister tell me what additional security measures have been put in place at all sites where asylum seekers are being held in such accommodation, and does he agree with the statement from Merseyside police that,

“Social media speculation, misinformation and rumour can actually damage the outcome of investigations and cause unnecessary fear and consequent behaviour”?

**Robert Jenrick:** We are working closely with the social media companies, and in fact are stepping up that activity. We supported a recent proposal to amend the Online Safety Bill by putting extra duties on the social media companies in respect of tackling organised immigration crime and abuse of this kind. We monitor social media content closely and the police will raise that with the social media companies through the appropriate channels.

I am afraid that the hon. Lady's accusation that the Home Office has stoked far right activities is both wrong and deeply offensive; the issue here is the number of people crossing the channel illegally.

**Alison Thewliss:** No, it is the backlog.

**Robert Jenrick:** It is not the backlog; that is a fantasy. The way to tackle this issue is not by making the UK a more attractive destination, but by tackling the illegal gangs and changing the incentives. We will only do that through having the most robust approach to illegal migration, including by ensuring those who come here in this manner are removed to a safe third country.

**Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con):** Like me, the Minister, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister believe that hotels are the wrong place to put people seeking asylum, but on Saturday in Skegness another protest is planned against the use of these hotels and, while there are legitimate concerns, I hope the Minister will agree that the shameless use of people's concerns by far-right groups is to be deplored and stands in the way of our having a sensible conversation that will in the long term allow us to move beyond the use of these hotels. Will he join me in appealing to the people of Skegness to focus, rightly, on those issues but not to join hands with far-right groups?



**Robert Jenrick:** I know my hon. Friend's constituents are frustrated by the use of hotels in Skegness—as are we in Government—and want to see action to tackle the small boats issue. They want to see our laws enforced and those coming here illegally apprehended and removed to other safe countries, but I know also that they will not want to join with more pernicious elements such as far-right groups and to stoke disorder or community tensions in his town. I applaud him for the work he is doing with his community; he held an important public meeting recently to listen to community concerns and raise them with me and the Home Secretary as we formulate policy.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Minister knows that there is a backlog and that hotels are having to be used because of it. He might not want to admit it from the Dispatch Box, but that is the reality.

My constituency is about 10 minutes away from where this incident in Merseyside happened and the Minister mentioned the asylum accommodation providers; may I urge him to work closely with them to ensure that wherever they are placing asylum seekers, they are working closely with the communities, the local authorities and the police there now, and they are ensuring that the accommodation that people are being placed in is able to handle and support them?

**Robert Jenrick:** The backlog is a contributing factor; it was a contributing factor when we came to power in 2010 and found a backlog of 500,000 cases, three times more than the level today. Simply processing those claims faster and making claiming asylum swifter and easier will not solve the problem, however; the problem will be solved by preventing people from reaching our shores in the first place.

On the situation in Merseyside, we are working closely with Merseyside police; we are in regular contact with them and with local authorities. We hold multi-agency meetings, which include the police, prior to standing up any new forms of accommodation so that these issues can be discussed. Where protests are planned, and we have extensive intelligence about that, we work closely with police forces so that they can make sensible preparations to keep the local community safe.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in condemning the use of violence and in thanking the police for their response, and I categorically agree with him that we must stop the people smugglers, stop the small boats and end illegal immigration into our country. I hear him on the need for further legislation down the line, but in the meantime can he assure me that every single one of the huge suites of powers that this Parliament granted to the Home Office in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 is being used to solve the problem quicker?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We passed that Act, which was opposed by the Labour party, and we are implementing every measure in it as swiftly as possible. Many of those measures are already making a difference, as seen in the number of arrests now being made of those people with their hand on the tiller of small boats when apprehended by Border Force and our partners in the English channel. That is important,

but we will follow that up in due course with further, even more robust legislation, which I am sure my hon. Friend will support and hope the Labour party will too.

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): What specific liaison occurred between the Home Office and Knowsley Council prior to the block booking of the hotel for the accommodation of asylum seekers? Did the Minister's Department anticipate problems such as the ones that occurred? What steps will he take to prevent a recurrence of such problems at other similar sites?

**Robert Jenrick:** Shortly after taking up this role, I changed the Home Office's engagement procedures to ensure that when accommodation is stood up, unless it is a grave emergency or we are ordered to stand it up by a court, we will provide at least 24 hours' notice to a local authority, and that there will be extensive consultation with such a local authority. I am pleased to say that today that level of consultation happens around three to four weeks in advance of standing up a site. There are usually multi-agency meetings prior to doing so and opportunities for Members of Parliament to meet either me or senior officials, but of course if any right hon. or hon. Member feels we are falling short of those standards, I encourage them to bring that to my attention.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I absolutely support my right hon. Friend the Minister and Members throughout the House in calling out and condemning the violence that took place and any far-right activists and groups operating in that area. They have no place in our society, as far as I am concerned.

But I am also clear that I totally agree with the Minister that we have to stop the small boats and stop the illegal immigration coming to our country. On 7 November last year, the Minister said to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) that he accepted that the significant number of people taken into our local area is disproportionate. On 13 December last year, the Prime Minister made the point that the use of hotel had to end soon. It is 20 February 2023 and the hotels of Stoke-on-Trent have yet to be emptied. When will this happen? Will the Minister commit to Stoke-on-Trent being the first place in the country to have its hotels emptied?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend has been an assiduous champion of his community and he wants his hotels back and to be put to good use, for the benefit of the local economy, for tourists and for visitors to Stoke-on-Trent. We agree, which is why we have set out our plans, including mandatory dispersal, working with local authorities throughout the country in a constructive and productive manner to find suitable accommodation that is not hotels. That is why we are also exploring a small number of larger sites that will provide decent but not luxurious accommodation at good value for money for the taxpayer. I reiterate that this challenge will be resolved only by reducing the flow of individuals coming across unnecessarily on those dangerous boats. Without that happening, we will be living with issues such as hotels for some time. That is why we are going to bring forward further legislation.



**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Minister told us a few minutes ago that part of the problem here is human rights lawyers who abuse and exploit our laws. That is obviously very serious, Mr Speaker. Any lawyer doing that needs to be stopped, so could the Minister tell the House how many solicitors, advocates and barristers have been reported by the Home Office in the last 12 months to the regulatory authorities?

**Robert Jenrick:** We are monitoring the activities, as it so happens, of a small number of legal practitioners, but it is not appropriate for me to discuss that here. The wider point I was making stands, which is that the British public are looking on askance at the fact that individuals, mostly young males, are setting off from a demonstrably safe country, France, and soliciting human traffickers to ferry them across the channel, and they are invariably throwing their documents into the sea, so that they can exploit our human rights laws. That needs to change. The British public are angry and frustrated at that situation. We understand that and that is why we are taking action.

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): The best solution to an end to the use of hotels and to protect our communities is to stop the boats, stamp out the human exploiters and people smugglers, and increase deportations. What steps are the Government taking to increase and speed up deportations, and to get the Rwanda scheme going? May I make a suggestion to the Minister? Doncaster Sheffield airport recently closed down. Will he consider using it to fly out illegal immigrants and deport them quickly?

**Robert Jenrick:** It is absolutely right that, as a deterrent, we increase the number of illegal migrants removed from this country, so that it is clear that anyone who comes here in breach of our laws in this manner will not get to stay in the UK. We have taken a number of steps recently. One has been our communiqué with Albania, a safe European country from which it should be extremely unusual for anyone to come here and successfully gain asylum. That communiqué is now in force, with updated country guidance, and individuals are now being removed from the United Kingdom on weekly flights to Albania. We are working very well with the Albanian Government. That is one example of how we can tackle this issue.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Just months apart, our country has seen two attacks on innocent people from right-wing extremists. First, a terrorist firebombed an immigration processing centre, and now we have seen an angry right-wing mob attack police outside a hotel housing asylum seekers. We are seeing more and more vile incidents that are fuelled by a far-right ideology. Does the Minister agree that it was a mistake for William Shawcross to say Prevent places too much emphasis on far-right extremism?

**Robert Jenrick:** No, I do not. William Shawcross conducted a very rigorous review over a long period of time which looked at the facts, and the facts are that there is extremism and violence in this country from both the far right and the far left, or Islamist extremists. We need to take action against both, but we need to apportion our resources in a manner that is proportionate to the challenge. That is the point that William Shawcross

was making. I fully support what he suggested. The Home Secretary, in her statement to the House, made clear that we will be implementing that as soon as possible.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Liverpool has a very proud history of chasing fascists off our streets or locking them into left luggage cupboards at Lime Street station. Does the Minister agree that the so-called independent review of Prevent failed to recognise the threat levels of far-right groups? What action is being taken to prevent serious incidents, such as that which took place in Knowsley?

**Robert Jenrick:** It is disappointing that the hon. Lady attempts to draw conclusions from these events with respect to Prevent. The Government have been very clear: extremism of any kind, whether from the far right or from Islamist extremism, is unacceptable and we will bear down on it with the full force of the law. With respect to the groups that were involved in Knowsley, as I said in answer to previous questions, we are monitoring them closely and we will take action, with the police, wherever we need to do so.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Earlier, the Minister mentioned the importance of observing the law. The European convention on human rights is, of course, still part of our domestic legal system, and human rights are not a dirty word; they are, in fact, universal.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, which I chair, is currently conducting an inquiry into the human rights of asylum seekers. We have heard evidence that a number of rights under the convention are engaged: the right to life, the right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to liberty and security, the right to dignity and respect for private and family life, and the right to be free from discrimination in the enjoyment of convention rights. Can the Minister tell me what steps the Home Secretary is taking to ensure that the human rights of asylum seekers are respected in the United Kingdom?

**Robert Jenrick:** We take our responsibilities to those in our care extremely seriously. While there will of course be occasions when we fall below the standards that we would expect, and we should learn from and correct those errors as quickly as possible, in general we care for asylum seekers well in this country, and we should be proud of that.

I have had the opportunity in this role to visit a range of facilities—difficult places such as Western Jet Foil, where we meet those people whom we have saved at sea; Manston, where we house them while we conduct security and health checks; and the child hotels where we house unaccompanied minors while we find local authority care for them. In general, the standards of these places are high, and the staff who are working in them are doing a good job on behalf of all of us, but if there are ways in which we can improve those services and ensure that we continue to meet our legal obligations, we can and should do so.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that there are people going around claiming to be journalists who are actually stirring up hatred and fear of asylum seekers. I watched

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one of their reports recently. It was directed at a building in my constituency which, it turns out, is not being used and will not be used to house asylum seekers. That broadcast was designed to create fear, and for the life of me I do not understand why it is still available on YouTube.

Let me ask the Minister this question. Does he think it is better for the Government, or the police or the Home Office, to ask the social media companies to take such videos down, or does he think—given that there is a law against inciting racial hatred in the Public Order Act 1986—that the prosecuting authorities should look at the videos and decide whether the threshold for prosecution has been met?

**Robert Jenrick:** I think the right hon. Gentleman has answered his own question, in that some of this content is vile and quite probably criminal, and in those instances the police should take action using the laws that are available to them. When we at the Home Office find such content we raise it with the police, and the police then raise it with the social media companies; but if the police feel that it meets the threshold for prosecution, they can and should be prosecuting.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right in saying that there are a small number of cases of so-called citizen journalists visiting hotels. Of course we all respect the right to protest and the right to free speech, but these individuals need to be careful to ensure that their actions do not stir up community tensions or spread disinformation, as is often the case.

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Like many others, I am heartbroken following the incidents in Knowsley. I stand in this Chamber as a proud product of immigration: my ancestors fled the great hunger in Ireland, as did those of so many of my fellow Scousers, which is why these events have caused such shock in Liverpool.

This is a wake-up call for those of us who want a society in which all are welcome. The words and the tone of hon. Members in this place and the media matter hugely, so will the Government commit themselves to ensuring that there is an end to the hateful rhetoric that demonises and dehumanises people? Will they put resources into communities to foster hope and understanding, and, crucially, will they provide resources for safe, welcoming and suitable community-based accommodation for all people seeking asylum?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am proud that the United Kingdom is one of the most generous and welcoming countries in the world. Since 2015, 440,000 people have come to our country on humanitarian grounds, and last year more humanitarian visas were issued than at any time since the end of the second world war. That is exactly the right approach, and we see it with great schemes such as Homes for Ukraine and the schemes applying to Afghanistan and Syria. It is true that the British public can see the difference between that and those people who are coming here illegally, abusing our generosity and our laws, and it is for that reason that we must take action to ensure that the illegal channel crossings end as swiftly as possible.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Government's politicised language on asylum seekers inevitably stokes division between communities and people in hostels, but Wales has shown that things can be different. Last year, the national youth organisation, Urdd, provided welcome centres with dedicated support services for refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine, and everybody benefited. Does the Minister agree that when the history books are written about his Government's sorry record on asylum, it will be recorded that people in Wales strove to act with humanity and for community harmony?

**Robert Jenrick:** I hope that when the history books are written about this Government, people will point to some of the fantastic schemes that we have created and that have commanded such broad support, including Homes for Ukraine and the Syria and Afghan schemes, all of which collectively have brought hundreds of thousands of people to our shores, where they have been welcomed into the homes of British citizens. But it is right that we make the distinction between those people—many of whom we have geographical, moral and historical obligations to—and the young men in safe countries such as France soliciting human traffickers to ferry them across the channel and to exploit our laws. This is an important distinction that we can see and that I think the British public more broadly can see, and the British public want us to address it.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Home Secretary was warned by Government lawyers last November that inflammatory immigration rhetoric risked inspiring far-right terror attacks. What discussions has the Home Secretary had with her Ministers about what is appropriate language?

**Robert Jenrick:** The Home Secretary was very clear that the violence we saw in Knowsley on 10 February was completely unacceptable, and she stands squarely with the brave officers from Merseyside police who responded to that incident. I pay tribute to them again today and to all those who work in our asylum system more broadly who do such a good job, often in very difficult circumstances.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier, the Minister mentioned that there was a level of frustration and concern among the British public. The people who are fleeing such horrors and trying to seek asylum are frustrated by the fact that they have been living in hotels, in some cases for coming up to two years. They are concerned about the backlog in Home Office applications, and they are concerned and frustrated when they are contacting MPs across the House to try to get their cases resolved. Does the Minister understand that accommodating people in hotels will not work? Can he guarantee that there will be a safety review assessment before people are put into those hotels, to protect them and the staff in the hotels?

**Robert Jenrick:** We have safeguarding procedures in place to support people going into the hotels and the staff who work in them. The hon. Lady's broader point was about the backlog. As I said earlier, the backlog was three times higher when we came to power in 2010, but that does not mean that we should not take action

to get it down and return to a position where we are processing claims in a sensible and swift manner. I have put in place, with the Home Secretary, new measures, and we are in the process of recruiting a significant number of further decision makers. We are already seeing significant progress in bringing down the legacy backlog, and the hon. Lady will start to see that flowing through in the numbers that are publicly reported and in the cases that come to her surgery. I am confident that we will meet our objective of eliminating the legacy backlog of initial decisions over the course of this year.

**Mick Whitley** (Birkenhead) (Lab): The vast majority of those who turned out on the night of 10 February were not hardened veterans of the organised far right; they were ordinary people whose frustrations had been fostered by this Government's decade-long neglect of their communities and whose fear had been stoked into hatred by the kind of inflammatory rhetoric that we hear all too often on the Government side of the House. Does the Minister accept that stranding refugees in hotels in left-behind communities such as Knowsley risks leaving these vulnerable people divorced from vital community support networks and means that they become a target for hatred? Will he explain what steps the Home Office is taking to find community-based alternatives to the use of hotels as contingency accommodation?

**Robert Jenrick:** As I have said, we are pursuing a strategy of replacing hotels with dispersal accommodation, which is agreed constructively between the Home Office, providers and local authorities and provides better value for taxpayers' money. That is the way to avoid this situation, other than addressing the root cause by preventing people from coming across the channel in the first place.

I encourage the hon. Gentleman to support our further steps over the coming months to bear down on individuals crossing the channel and to create a system whereby people who come here illegally will not find a route to remain in the UK, because that is the enduring solution to this problem.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The truth is that this is not the first time we have seen violence and intimidation directed towards refugees in these hotels. Indeed, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) outlined his fear of a further protest coming this weekend.

Hope not Hate has documented hundreds of incidents involving Patriotic Alternative, Britain First and so-called migrant hunters. The Minister says the Home Office reports to the police incidents that it feels may breach the Public Order Act 1986, perhaps in the same way it is monitoring these lawyers, yet nothing is happening. He says these groups are being monitored closely. For the avoidance of doubt, will he set out the threshold for prosecution? This will keep happening until we are clear that free speech does not involve 50% of participants in the conversation being in fear of their life. This is harassment and terrorism on our doorstep, and it needs to be dealt with properly. What on earth is he doing to prosecute these people?

**Robert Jenrick:** I have spoken on a number of occasions in recent days to Home Office officials, the national police co-ordination centre and operational policing colleagues. They are monitoring this activity very closely, and they are keeping a close eye on these groups. Where

they believe content requires further action, they will take it, but it is for the police to take that action rather than the Home Office.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The anti-Muslim group Britain First has activists in my constituency. The group is known to have carried out more than 80 visits to asylum accommodation sites and to have distributed leaflets containing Islamophobic narratives in those areas. The language of Britain First is only a few steps of escalation from the anti-migrant sentiments expressed by the Home Secretary when she claimed there was an "invasion" by migrants on the south coast. Does the Minister regret the Home Secretary's use of such inflammatory language, which feeds into and enables far-right groups? Will he explain what proactive work the Home Office is leading to get a grip on far-right extremism?

**Robert Jenrick:** I usually have great respect for the hon. Lady, but it is wrong to equate the actions of far-right groups with the comments of the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary has condemned the violence we saw in Knowsley, and she is working with the police to ensure it is properly investigated and that the police have the resources and the support they need for that investigation. We will bear down on far-right extremism, just as we care about Islamist extremism. There is no place in this country for any form of extremism, and we will ensure the police have the resources they need.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): When the Government use language closely associated with the far right, it only provides encouragement. We know these far-right groups are trying to stoke local problems around the hotels in which asylum seekers are being housed. Has the incident in Knowsley inspired the Government to review how they assess the safety of these locations and the powers that the police and those investigating online activity need to deter the people who are trying to exploit this situation?

**Robert Jenrick:** We have reviewed the security at these hotels and other asylum accommodation centres. The national police co-ordination centre will be issuing updated guidance to our providers and local partners on how they should ensure correct levels of security at each site. Security is based on risk, so procedures will vary depending on intelligence. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we take this issue very seriously.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The disorder at Rotherham and Knowsley was instigated by fascist goons such as Patriotic Alternative, and the Home Secretary must take a share of the blame for using rhetoric that helped to create the environment that normalised these racist thugs. The Erskine Bridge hotel in my constituency is planned to be the largest of these hotels in the UK, and we have seen this group incite and inflame local sensitivities for its own racist and divisive ends. I have made urgent suggestions to the Home Office to address legitimate concerns. Will the Minister chase a response, so that we can drive the far right out of Erskine?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am aware of the site in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the protests around it. I spoke to officials earlier today regarding it and they



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gave me an update. I would be happy to connect him with those officials so that he can raise his concerns and they can support him in any way.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister speaks as though all of the issues were someone else's problem. He has acknowledged some changes he is bringing into the asylum system. I am one of the top six customers of the Home Office for my constituents and it is the worst it has been in 18 years, but in truth what we are seeing here is the chickens coming home to roost in the impact on communities, the appalling situation that many asylum seekers are living in and the danger around these sites. When we will see a real change, a step change, as a result of the changes he is introducing? I cannot see it happening any time soon.

**Robert Jenrick:** The Prime Minister set out a plan at the end of last year and I am working every day to implement it. We are already seeing significant progress on the asylum backlog, with cases falling significantly with every passing week, and we are recruiting more decision makers into the Home Office to do this. We are working intensively with local authorities to find better and greater value for money accommodation through the national dispersal scheme, rather than hotels. If the hon. Lady, as a valued Member of this House, has suggestions as to ways in which we can improve the quality of service, I would be happy to meet her to discuss them.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): The Minister must be well aware that what happened in Knowsley is not an isolated incident; the far right is attacking hotels in other places and attacking asylum seekers regularly. We have a system that spends a great deal of public money to keep desperate people in absolute poverty and degradation in these terrible hotels—their use obviously needs to end. Will he say a word of humanity about the fear that many of these people must be facing? They are refugees from wars, famine and human rights abuses who are looking for a place of safety in this world. They are human beings just like the rest of us. Surely they deserve to be able to exercise their legal rights to seek asylum and not be constantly accused of being illegal when this is a legal right.

**Robert Jenrick:** It is, just as a matter of fact, a criminal offence to cross the channel in a small boat, so those who enter the UK in that manner are in breach of our laws. The broader point that the right hon. Gentleman makes is, of course, absolutely right: irrespective of that, those people who come here should be treated compassionately and we should abide by our broader legal obligations. The hotels and accommodation we provide are of a good quality. They will vary and if there are poor instances, I will take action against the providers. However, generally speaking, they are of a good quality and they are significantly better than what we find in comparable European countries. Many of the people who arrive on our shores in small boats have

spent a sustained period in camps such as those in Calais; the way in which we treat people in this country is far superior.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Two weeks ago, at departmental questions, I requested a meeting with a Minister about the continued use of hotels in my constituency and the broader Liverpool city region. In the meantime, a group called the Patriotic Alternative has started distributing leaflets in one part of my constituency. Again, I request that meeting.

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, and I apologise if there has been any delay. He raises a broader point of concern to us, which is the leafleting by far-right groups of the communities surrounding hotels. There have been examples of leaflets with faces of Members of Parliament and local councillors on them. Whenever I have seen those, I have raised them with local police and the Home Office's dedicated counter-terrorism support. That kind of intimidatory leaflet is completely unacceptable on the streets of our country.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity when he rightly condemns right-wing extremism—indeed, all extremism—but it is now three years since the former commissioner for counter-extremism warned that the Government's counter-extremism strategy was out of date because it did not have key measures to tackle online radicalisation. When can we expect to see those measures before the House?

**Robert Jenrick:** I will take the hon. Gentleman's question away and ask the Security Minister to write to him with a fuller reply. I have always taken extremism seriously. For example, I worked with Sara Khan in her work on tackling the victims of extremism. Extremism, whether from the far right or Islamism, is pernicious and needs to be tackled. We will do everything we can to address it.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Minister will be aware that there are asylum seekers who have complex physical and mental health needs, and placing them in hotels can exacerbate those needs. Can he assure us that he will speak to the refugee charities, particularly the Scottish Refugee Council and the Refugee Council, about both the far-right activity and their concerns about placing asylum seekers in hotel accommodation?

**Robert Jenrick:** The Home Office works very closely with non-governmental organisations, including the Refugee Council, and takes their views into consideration. I have been clear that no one in Government wants to see the hotel accommodation continue for one day more than is absolutely necessary. There are only two ways in which we will resolve this: first, and most importantly, by stopping the boats coming in the first place; and secondly, for as long as we have illegal migration, by working with local authorities, such as those in Scotland, to find better dispersal accommodation. If the hon. Gentleman can support us in that effort with respect to the Scottish Government and local authorities, I would be grateful.

## Fan-led Review and Football White Paper

4.32 pm

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the fan-led review of football governance and the publication of a football White Paper.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew)**: Our national game has become a worldwide sport, loved and followed by millions. The growth of the premier league, English football's top division, is an achievement to be celebrated. Our grassroots game is a force for good to bring people and communities together across the country. However, the findings of the fan-led review made it clear that the underlying financial and governance structures that support English football are unstable and fragile. The review highlighted the perverse financial incentives that encourage clubs to overspend on chasing success. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) for her considerable work in this area.

The issue is exacerbated by poor corporate governance. Some clubs lack scrutiny of decision making, are poor at communicating with fans and lack transparency in decision making. Defective industry self-regulation throughout football has led to a high and growing risk of financial failure among clubs. Indeed, one of my first meetings as the Minister for Sport was with fans groups. I heard at first hand how poor ownership and governance can leave clubs at the mercy of careless owners.

The structural weakness, along with the risk of breakaway competitions such as the European super league, threatens the stability of the football pyramid as a whole and risks leaving fans powerless and our national game in peril. The unique importance of football clubs to their fans and local communities means that the social cost of financial failures and the loss of clubs would be significant. That includes the risk of irreversibly damaging our valued cultural heritage.

Reform is needed to avoid those failures and prevent those impacts from arising. It is clear that the game is in need of significant reform. As I have stressed to the football authorities on several occasions, there is much that football could already be doing to protect the game. This includes reaching a much-needed agreement on a new package of financial redistribution for the football pyramid, and, again, I urge them to solve this issue.

The Government responded to the fan-led review in April 2022, and we will publish a football governance White Paper this week. This will set out a clear and well thought-through package of reforms that will ensure that the foundations of the game are strong and that the game can continue to thrive.

I make a commitment that Ministers will come before the House to make a statement with a full announcement on how we intend to reform our national game for the future and for fans, and we look forward to ensuring that hon. Members have the opportunity to fully scrutinise those proposals.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

**Lucy Powell**: I thank the Minister for his response, but it is just not good enough. Three weeks ago, the entire White Paper was conveniently “leaked” to the press. He and I both know that it was ready to be given to the House before recess, yet he has still not published it today, and the Secretary of State has not even turned up. The very well-received fan-led review, conducted by the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), was published more than a year ago. It was welcomed by both sides of the House, and the Government committed to implementing it in full. However, five months later, they dropped the ball and would commit only to a White Paper, which we have been waiting for ever since. Fans, football clubs and their communities deserve better and this Government are letting them down. Can the Minister tell the House why he has not published it today, or before today, given that it was clearly expected before recess?

There is widespread support for an independent football regulator, and for the recommendations of the review. The arguments for that grow stronger every day: Bury FC has collapsed; and Derby County nearly went under. From Southend to Scunthorpe, other clubs stand on the brink. A European Super League is back on the table. Manchester City and the Premier League face years in the courts. Negotiations over the sale of Manchester United, Liverpool and Everton are going on as we speak, and we are still nowhere on those financial settlements for the pyramid.

Fans are desperate for a proper say and for assurances about ownership and sustainability of these global and local assets, yet without a regulator these assurances cannot be made. Will the Government take responsibility for clubs that go bust, that spiral into decline or that are bought by unsuitable new owners, in the years they have wasted bringing in the regulator? As we will see again today, Parliament fully supports these proposals. Labour is fully committed to them. The Minister is facing an open goal, so instead of constantly passing it back, can he just put the ball into the back of the net?

**Mr Speaker**: Just before the Minister responds, let me add that the Secretary of State did tell me that this was a serious leak. In which case, I would like to know whether there has been a full investigation, and at what point the House will be updated on that investigation, which I presume has started.

**Stuart Andrew**: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I make no apology for taking time to ensure that the White Paper, which we will publish this week, actually addresses what are essentially quite complex and sometimes difficult issues. It is important that we think about all aspects of the game. We do not want to do something that might damage the commercial success of the premier league. The Opposition may think that they can just publish a report in a week, but I have taken a considerable amount of time—and I am glad that I have done so—to meet all the stakeholders involved in this and to listen to their varying views. If the shadow Secretary of State had had the same conversations, she will have seen that there are competing views. It is important, therefore, that we take those carefully on board, listen to them and ensure that we come up with the best advice possible. We have also ensured that we have sought the best

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external advice from those who have been involved in the establishment of other regulators. That is the right thing to do.

I must point out that it was this Government who commissioned the review in the first place and, as I have mentioned a number of times, that football need not have waited; it could have got on with this, but it has not. We will publish our intention with the White Paper this week so that we can celebrate what is good about football and reform it where it is needed.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the acting Chair of the Select Committee.

**Damian Green (Ashford) (Con):** I will take a self-denying ordinance and avoid bad football puns in asking my question—

**Lucy Powell:** Leave that to me.

**Damian Green:** Thank you; I will.

My right hon. Friend the Minister is aware of the huge degree of unanimity across the House on the need for urgent reform, given the many crises that we know have affected and continue to affect clubs at the top of the game and further down the pyramid. On that basis, I am pleased to hear that we will see the White Paper later this week, but he will be aware that that is only one step in the process. The White Paper will need to be followed by legislation before we see a regulator or any of the other reforms we want. Can he tell me whether it is the Government's intention to legislate in this Session, and if not, is it their intention to legislate in this Parliament to introduce these much-needed reforms?

**Stuart Andrew:** My right hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the issue. We will set out our plans for reform of the game in the forthcoming White Paper. As with all Government policy, when the Government commit to reform, legislation only follows when parliamentary time allows, and we will be working on that at pace.

**Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab):** Will the Minister just stop trying to deflect attention by saying that football will sort itself out? The mess that the game is in is because football has not sorted itself out. That is why we need the Government to come in with a clear statement, a White Paper and a commitment to legislate speedily. The message is simple—he must have talked to the English Football League, which says there is no chance of an agreement on funding with the Premier League, because the Premier League holds all the money and all the cards and it will never give to the rest of football that which is enough to make the rest of the game sustainable.

**Stuart Andrew:** The hon. Gentleman likes to tease me regularly on this issue. I agree with him; that is precisely why we will publish the White Paper on Thursday, and I am sure he will be pleased with its contents.

**Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con):** Supporters groups are doing hugely important work. It has taken groups such as Action for Albion and Shareholders for Albion to highlight the genuine concerns about owners'

financial mismanagement of West Bromwich Albion. Will the Minister ensure that supporters groups have an enhanced role in football governance when the White Paper is published later this week?

**Stuart Andrew:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been an active campaigner on this issue and has worked incredibly hard with the fans groups in her area. She is right, and that is why the first meeting I had was with fans groups. I want to ensure that they are the ones we consider most when we publish the White Paper.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** I am concerned that the Minister, in his response, has pointed the finger at least to some extent at the EFL and implied that he has listened to owners as much as he has to fans. That deeply concerns me. Two great challenges that football faces are: bad and dodgy governance, and institutionalised unfairness of income. Some 93% of football television income goes to the premier league clubs, despite the fact that a majority of fans going to watch games each weekend are going to EFL and non-league games, not premier league games. Only 35% of transfer revenue from premier league clubs goes to the EFL, even though the majority of British premier league players have played in those lower divisions. Does the Minister understand why many of us are concerned about the tardiness of this process and the fact that Ministers seem to be listening to the owners more than to the fans?

**Stuart Andrew:** I totally reject that accusation; if anything, I have spent more time with EFL, the Premier League, the Football Association, and fans groups and supporters groups than with any of the owners, because I recognise that the changes we need to see arise from the evidence that the fan-led review highlighted, much of which came from hundreds of hours of work listening mainly to fans. The hon. Gentleman's interpretation of what I have said, as meaning that I am spending more time with owners, is factually incorrect.

**Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con):** The Minister is a diligent man, and I am pleased that he has taken the time to look into the system and is coming forward with a White Paper next week. He cannot comment specifically on the Manchester City issue, but the fact that there are more than 100 charges—particularly about not co-operating—does raise questions. Will he confirm that the independent regulator will have the power to compel clubs to co-operate with the Premier League and the authorities when they are dealing with such important issues?

**Stuart Andrew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that I cannot comment on a live investigation. However, the case that he highlights does not affect the reforms that we will introduce, which we know are needed in football. We want football authorities to take action where they can, and they have in this instance. I am sure that he will be reassured by the contents of the football governance White Paper that we will publish shortly.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** The Government commissioned the fan-led review of football governance, and it was the Government who published it. They did not make it clear at the time that they intended to



prevaricate and then announce further consultation through a White Paper. One wonders what it is the Government think they will find out from the White Paper that they have not already found out from the fan-led review. Will the Minister commit to implementing all 10 recommendations of the fan-led review, or is the White Paper going to unpick them?

**Stuart Andrew:** The hon. Gentleman will have to see what is in the White Paper when we publish it this week.

**Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): I absolutely welcome the Minister's statement and the Government's commitment to implementing the fan-led review, because although next month marks the first anniversary of Southend becoming a city, our treasured football club, Southend United, faces severe financial difficulties. Supporters' clubs have done a huge amount, but will the Minister meet me to discuss what the Government can do, if anything, to help? Will he also confirm that the upcoming White Paper will address the hugely unfair redistribution of Premier League solidarity payments, which is one of the reasons why Southend United is in the position that it is?

**Stuart Andrew:** I commend my hon. Friend for her work, particularly in support of her local football club. I would be more than happy to meet her. I can assure her that we are taking action exactly because of examples such as the one she raises, as she will see in the White Paper when we publish it.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I noticed that the Minister did not answer the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) on when we will see the implementation of the White Paper in primary legislation. Given the way things are going, the danger is that it will be delayed until next year. That is too late. A number of clubs are already in serious financial straits, and a number of them could go under within the next few months. As we have seen over the past few years, that situation will get graver and graver, not better.

**Stuart Andrew:** I absolutely recognise that the issue needs addressing. That is why we have taken a considerable amount of time to get this right, and I believe that we have. I think that the White Paper will help us to secure our national game, but—as I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green)—when parliamentary time allows.

**Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

As has already been mentioned by a number of Members, Southend United is in financial crisis. As well as involving fans, can we involve the broader community? In the case of the Southend United development, there will be an extra 2,400 social houses as a result of the development if the club goes forward beyond the insolvency in two weeks' time.

**Stuart Andrew:** I know that my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) have worked incredibly closely together in support of the local football club. He is right to highlight the significant role that all football clubs play in our communities. Addressing many of those issues is precisely

what we sought to do in developing the White Paper, and I hope that he will be satisfied when he sees it published this week.

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Football without fans is nothing. The delay in the publication of the White Paper should worry every supporter. What we need now is protection for the future of the game: we need a regulator with teeth and a fit and proper owners test that is fit for purpose. As a Liverpool fan, I am worried about what we might face in future—I am sure that every other supporter of a club is the same. The delay in legislation harms the future of the game.

Events this week, with the publication of the independent review of the events in Paris, which exonerated Liverpool supporters, show that governing bodies such as UEFA and Governments have a long way to go with regard to the treatment of supporters. We must never forget that they are the lifeblood of the game, which is why this is important—this is a crucial point in football history. Will the Minister assure me that the White Paper places supporters at the heart of decision making to ensure that their voices are heard and that they can play a major role in shaping the future of football in this country?

**Stuart Andrew:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We were all glad to see that the Liverpool fans were exonerated. The fact that they faced such disgraceful action was appalling. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly meet her French counterpart to understand what lessons are being learned from that awful incident. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the fans need to be at the heart of this, which is why they were the first group that I met when I was appointed, as I said at the beginning. They have been foremost in my thoughts when I have been working on the White Paper.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I welcome the Government's commitment to bring forward the White Paper this week. I want to press the Minister on three points. First, it is important to ensure that we have a robust test for the ownership, particularly foreign ownership, of our clubs. Secondly, it is critical to ensure that the parachute payments for relegation do not make it almost impossible, frankly, for clubs to break into what risks becoming the closed shop of the premier league. Thirdly, as several hon. Members have said, it is central to ensure that we legislate in a timely fashion. I gently point out to the Government that we are not overburdened with legislation on Thursdays, for example, so there is scope within the next year to bring forward legislation to deliver a great outcome for the game that we all love.

**Stuart Andrew:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that the ownership of our clubs is an important area of work. We know that there are some very good owners and some very bad owners; that will be addressed in the White Paper. It will also address the fact that we want to see payments go down the pyramid, so that there is more financial sustainability. On committing to legislative time in Parliament, as a former Whip, I know how much trouble I would be in if I were to step on the Whips' plans, but I will certainly emphasise his point.

**Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): The Prime Minister promised to implement all 10 of the fan-led review's recommendations before the World cup, including having an independent regulator and giving fans a key role in decisions about selling stadiums or changing a team's name, colours or crest, yet he failed to even publish a White Paper in time. Can the Minister commit that all those measures will be covered in the White Paper that is now coming out this week, and can he commit to making them law this year?

**Stuart Andrew:** I am in terrible danger of repeating myself, but I assure the hon. Lady that many of the issues that she has raised are included in the White Paper. We have taken careful consideration of all the points raised, not just in the review, of course, but by other stakeholders, as she will see in just a few days.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response. Obviously, I understand the caution that he is referring to, but as an avid football fan, I know first hand the disconnect between fans and club owners. Does he agree that the owners and directors test, as proposed in the fan-led review, is a workable solution to ensure that the sophisticated business regulations required are produced as a result of the review?

**Stuart Andrew:** Of course, the owners and directors test is an important element of the White Paper. We want to ensure that the people who own the clubs are not reckless with that ownership—they are custodians of important community assets. We want to ensure that that happens and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will enjoy reading that section of the White Paper.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Over the years, we have seen some owners treat football clubs more like cash cows than the community assets we all want them

to be. Pending the publication of the White Paper later this week, will the Minister say whether he thinks there is merit in ensuring that any new owner seeking to take control of an English club is subject to a more stringent fit and proper persons test?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): We are on our way to Wembley, and I am sure the Minister will join me in wishing every success to Newcastle United in the league cup final on Sunday. However, he must know that even that success will not erase the years of anger and frustration at unsuitable, unaccountable, and sometimes downright dodgy ownership within a Premier League that is out of touch and does not seem to care about fans. Fans should be at the heart of football, but this Government are messing with the heart and soul of fans. Will the Minister commit now that the White Paper will institute an independent regulator and that fans will have real power in the beautiful game, and that those measures will be in place by the start of the next season?

**Stuart Andrew:** I am looking forward to attending that match at the weekend, and I already have a list as long as my arm of people who want to join me. The hon. Lady is right; she is an advocate, and other advocates such as my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) have talked about the club Accrington Stanley and all the work it does and how important the fans are. The hon. Lady is right to raise that issue, and I can assure her that throughout this process, I have tried my best to ensure that the voices of fans are heard in the White Paper that will be published this week.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. Would Members wishing to leave please now do so, quickly and quietly.



## Security Threat to UK-Based Journalists

4.56 pm

**The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat):** I want to update the House on steps that the Home Secretary and I have been taking to address the concerning activities of the Iranian regime and its operatives in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom is committed to defending our freedoms—values that define us and make us who we are—and none is more fundamental than freedom of the press. The Iranian regime's violent oppression of its own citizens and repeated violations of human rights have shown us who the supreme leader and his enforcers really are. It has murdered its own people and made hostages of others, and the protests that began in September 2022 show that it does not have the support of the Iranian people.

In recent months, the Iranian regime has publicly called for the capture or killing of those holding it to account. That includes very real and specific threats towards UK-based journalists working for Iran International, a prominent Persian-language news channel, and their families. The Home Secretary and I absolutely condemn this outrageous violation of our sovereignty and the attempted violation of the human rights of those journalists. In response, we have put in place an extremely robust range of security measures, including armed policing. However, because of the severity of the threat and the particularities of the site, counter-terrorism policing have advised Iran International to move to a more secure location in the United Kingdom. Until its studio is ready, it has chosen to continue its broadcasting from existing studios in the United States—I assure the House that this measure will be temporary. Until then, I have asked officials to help find a temporary location for Iran International's UK operations, and we will make sure that its permanent new studio in the United Kingdom is secure. I spoke to counter-terrorism policing this morning to confirm that.

Let me be clear: freedom of the press is at the heart of our freedoms. Tehran's efforts to silence Iran International are a direct attack on our freedoms, and an attempt to undermine our sovereignty. They will fail. Democracy is as much about journalists and civic activists as it is about politicians. The media must be free to work without fear, which is why this Government have already set up the Defending Democracy Taskforce, and why we will be taking further action in response to these threats. I am not alone in saying this: earlier this afternoon, I spoke to my counterparts in France, Germany and the United States. They all agreed, and spoke of incidents that have targeted individuals in their own countries. When I spoke to Iran International over the weekend, it praised our police; it is right to do so, because only last week, the vigilance of our officers resulted in an individual being charged with a terrorism offence after being arrested near the broadcaster's office.

None the less, this is clearly an appalling situation. The Government, police, agencies and our allies are working together to ensure that Iran International's operations will resume, and these threats will not silence us, nor them. I know that this House will wish to express its support for that principle too.

As of last week, we had responded to 15 credible threats to kill or kidnap British or UK-based individuals by the Iranian regime since the start of 2022. Between 2020 and 2022, Iran tried to collect intelligence on UK-based Israeli and Jewish individuals. We believe this information was a preparation for future lethal operations. In 2021, UK police asked partners to share information on Iran-based Mohammed Mehdi Mozayyani, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps who worked to conduct a lethal operation against Iranian dissidents here in the United Kingdom. We know that the Iranian intelligence services work with organised criminal gangs, and I can assure the House and the public that we will go after anyone working with them.

Our partners in Europe and the United States face similar threats, and we are working together to keep our people safe. My call this afternoon with other allies was about co-ordinating action that we will take to protect ourselves and ensure a unified response to these threats. We are strongest when we work with our allies around the world, and the Iranian regime should be in no doubt that we are absolutely united.

Let me be clear that this is a persistent threat. It is not carried out by rogue elements, but is a conscious strategy of the Iranian regime. Our Government will act. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has already summoned the Iranian chargé d'affaires, and we will be looking at further sanctions on those linked to the Iranian regime. We already have around 300 sanctions in place against Iran, including of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in its entirety.

Today, alongside international partners, eight further individuals were sanctioned, but our response will not end there. Today I have instructed the Home Office to lead work on countering Iranian state threats, making use of the full breadth and expertise of the Government and our extraordinary and courageous police, security and intelligence agencies. We will target the full spectrum of threats we see coming from Tehran. I will be asking our security agencies to explore what more we can do with our allies to tackle threats of violence, but we will also address the wider threat to economic security from illicit finance and the threat from malign interference in our democratic society.

At home, the Charity Commission will soon report on its statutory inquiry into the Islamic Centre of England, which is accused of having links to the Iranian regime. We must ensure that our police and intelligence agencies have the power to crack down on state threats such as those from Iran, which is why urge the House to back the National Security Bill, which is going through Parliament at the moment.

The relationship we have with Iran is not the one we want; it is not the one we chose. We have a deep respect for Iran's rich history and for the Iranian people. From the "Shahnameh" to the works of Saadi, the wealth of the nation has been in the words of her people. They taught ethics and governance and the importance of law, but today the tyrants in Tehran have betrayed those great pillars of Persian civilisation and are trying to silence those words and their own people, but they will not be silenced. To the brave Iranian journalists and community here in the United Kingdom, I say that this country, this Government and this whole House stands in solidarity with you against the oppression that you face. Mr Deputy Speaker, let me directly address the

[Tom Tugendhat]

Iranian regime, which is responsible for these heinous crimes. We will hold you to account for your blatant violation of our laws and values. We will expose your crimes against the British people and against the Iranian people. We will expose your actions around the world. We will work with our allies to hold you to account, personally. We will act to keep our country safe. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the shadow Minister.

5.3 pm

**Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab):** I am grateful to the Minister for advance sight of his statement. As he has already said, press freedom is fundamental to any liberal democracy, and it is a right that we are all committed to defending across this House. We should all be appalled that Iran International has felt the need to close its office here in the UK following police advice after a series of threats made against its brave journalists.

The UK has a proud history of supporting those who speak truth to power. Since 2017, Iran International has operated successfully here in the UK. In recent weeks, it has shone a spotlight on the Iranian regime's violent repression of those protesting the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini and of those taking to the streets calling for civil liberties to be upheld. For that, they have been targeted by the regime, and, unbelievably, deemed to be a threat to Iran's national security, with threats that agents of the organisation would be pursued.

As the Minister knows, in November's annual threat assessment, the director general of MI5, Ken McCallum, stated that Iran had sought to murder or kidnap individuals in the UK on at least 10 occasions. Just this week, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing in the UK stated that there had been five more plots since then, saying that they had disrupted

"15 plots since the start of 2022 to either kidnap or even kill British or UK-based individuals perceived as enemies of the regime."

I know that across this House we are united in our outrage that any foreign Government would think that they could conduct activity in this way within the borders of another country. As a democracy, we have to send the strongest possible message that we, our policing and security services, and the British public, will not tolerate it. I have met with representatives from Iran International. As the Minister said, they have spoken highly of UK counter-terrorism policing and our security services. I want to put my thanks to them on the record for the work that they undertake every day.

However, I have asked the Government five times in this Chamber since October why we are not going further to deploy sanctions and proscription powers against those acting on behalf of Iran. In response to my question at the last Home Office questions earlier this month, the Minister spoke of his desire to see the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps proscribed, so why are they not, either through the use of existing terrorism powers or new state threats equivalent powers? He has not mentioned it at all in his statement today. That means the IRGC are still free to organise and establish support here in the UK. We have to put a stop to that.

There are people appointed to posts here in the UK who are representatives of the supreme leader himself. Why are they still here? The Minister talked of instructing his Department today to lead work. Although the threat from Iran has escalated, it has not come from out of the blue. Why have we found ourselves ill-prepared to respond to the threat? The United States proscribed the IRGC as a terrorist organisation in 2019. Activity from Iran has been a feature of the annual threat assessment for some years. There were warnings in the 2021 integrated review, as well as in the Intelligence and Security Committee report of March 2022, which said:

"There also exists a continuing threat of state-sponsored assassination, attacks and abductions of those perceived as dissidents."

Again, in November of last year, we had the starkest warnings from the director general of MI5. The ISC's annual report published last year said:

"In November 2021, the Committee announced that it will be undertaking an Inquiry into national security issues relating to Iran."

I understand that the ISC still has not been able to progress that report, and so I would welcome an explanation from the Minister as to why requested information has not been forthcoming to Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, with an assurance that it is being addressed as a priority.

The UK must always be a safe place for journalists to speak truth to power. The rest of the world is watching. We cannot ever allow authoritarian tyranny to be exported to the UK and conducted on behalf of other hostile states within our borders. I ask the Minister: when will we see the sanctions? Can he provide us with a timeline? He has talked about co-ordinated responses, but those can be slow. When will we see proscription? We have to get this done. We are looking to table amendments to the National Security Bill; will the Minister support them? We very much stand ready to work with the Government in making this happen.

**Tom Tugendhat:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. She is absolutely right to press me on those issues, because it is absolutely true that this has been ongoing. She is also aware that proscription is a legal instrument, and that therefore there is a natural element of discussion. We do not comment on whether we are going to proscribe; we wait until we have the actions ready to do it. She will understand that we will wait until we have full advice.

What we need to be doing is exactly what we are doing, which is sanctioning individuals. I announced eight further sanctions today. We have spoken about various different actions we have taken, and I am grateful that the hon. Member has quite rightly praised the work of the police and the intelligence services, which have done a phenomenal job in keeping us safe. I am afraid that it is not true to say that nothing has happened since the IR. Since then, MI5, Counter Terrorism Policing and many other agencies of the state have been working tirelessly to keep this country safe, and to defend our values and freedoms.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

**Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** I can confirm what is in the public domain, which is that the committee is undertaking a study of Iran and its security

implications, and I will just say that I am cautiously optimistic that various causes of delay in the supply of evidence and the progress of that work are within sight of being overcome.

I would like to add my congratulations to the police and security authorities on the announced foiling of 15 credible threats. What I would like to know, without any prejudice to our future inquiries, is whether the Minister is in a position to tell us anything about the origins of the people making those 15 threats. Were they home-grown, or were they people who had come here from Iran? He does hint at the involvement of criminal gangs, which suggests a franchise. How are people able, in this country, to pose such threats? They know who they are, so it should not be difficult for him, either now or in a subsequent announcement, to give an analysis to this House.

**Tom Tugendhat:** I hope my right hon. Friend will invite me to his committee, where I will be able to answer these questions more fully. He will understand that I cannot address them on the Floor of the House. His reading of the question, however, is interesting and, as usual, very well informed.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for advance sight of it, as well as for the way in which he has approached this very serious issue this afternoon.

We in the SNP are alarmed and deeply disturbed by the serious threats to UK-based journalists by the Iranian regime, and we condemn in the strongest possible terms the horrifying threats to journalists, their family members and all others involved. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the brave independent Iranian journalists, particularly those from Iran International, who have shone a light on the recent protest movements and shown the world the continuous and shocking human rights abuses by the Iranian security forces and the Iranian regime. We commend their courage in continuing to do so in the face of threats that have come in a place where they should expect to feel safe.

It is very welcome that the Minister is talking about more sanctions today, and I appreciate what he said about not announcing the proscription of organisations such as the IRGC on the Floor of the House, but I would strongly urge him to consider doing so and to consider doing so quickly. This is the source of great uncertainty and great fear for many Iranians who are living in the UK, including those who have come to visit my surgeries, and he may remember that I raised the case of a constituent a few weeks ago. Those Iranians I have spoken to in Glasgow are scared. They do not know where they are safe, and that should not be the situation for anybody who has come to live in these islands. They should be able to go about their lives in Glasgow or anywhere else without fearing who might be coming to get them, and without having to look over their shoulder whether out in the streets or even in universities, where they do not feel as though they can be quite as safe as they should be.

Could I also ask the Minister what approach he is taking with colleagues in the Home Office to the issuing of visas for those who fear that if they return to Iran they will be persecuted, for those—perhaps if they are on a student visa that may run out—who are in limbo at

the moment and are not certain as to what their future will be, and for visitors? What is the further approach to those who may actually pose a risk to people in the UK in getting visas for here?

**Tom Tugendhat:** I thank the hon. Member for the tone in which she has approached this. She is absolutely right, of course, that anybody in the United Kingdom—whether they are in Gloucester or in Glasgow—should be absolutely as safe as any UK citizen. She is right that, sadly, some are being targeted. While I hear her words on proscription, it is worth noting that the National Security Bill we have brought in does allow us to exercise almost all the powers of proscription against state threats, which will be enormously helpful. I know that she has in the past been very supportive of various elements of that, so I hope we will be able to continue enjoying the support of her and her party.

The hon. Member raises the question of visas, and she is absolutely right to do so. I will not comment on individual cases for obvious reasons, but as she knows, the UK Government and the British people have been exceptionally generous to those in need of sanctuary in the United Kingdom, and I am absolutely certain that that policy will continue.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** My right hon. Friend will be aware that Iran has one of the worst media freedom records in the world. When the Government press the Government of Iran over the outrageous threats made against Iran International, will they also raise the question of the continuing persecution of family members of BBC Persian service staff who are still living in Iran? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the threats against Iran International in this country are a further demonstration of the need for the cross-Government National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, and will he continue to give that committee every support to ensure that media freedom in the UK is fully protected?

**Tom Tugendhat:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. When he was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, he was exemplary in supporting media freedom around the world. I completely agree with his comments on BBC Persian, which offers an extraordinary window—not just for the Persian but for the Iranian people—into the truth that is quite rightly highlighted by their broadcasts, and allows those of us who are lucky enough to watch BBC Persian here in the UK to understand what is going on in Tehran and across Iran. I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend and I give that same commitment.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and for his work to ensure that Iran International returns to the UK before too long. Until a few days ago, it was broadcasting from Chiswick business park in my constituency, and I visited last year. It is beyond contemptible that the Iranian Government have attempted to export their crackdown on free speech and the freedom of the press, and to endanger not only the journalists but the other workers in the business park and local people. Iran International and I are hugely grateful for the steps the Metropolitan police have taken to ensure the safety of journalists and the wider public, but what are the Government doing to ensure that journalists in my constituency and across the country are never again forced to leave their workplace to protect the rest of the public?



**Tom Tugendhat:** May I first pay tribute to the hon. Lady and her constituents for their work supporting Iran International? She will be aware of the site and its peculiarities, and therefore the nature of finding an alternative venue. That is exactly what we and the Metropolitan police are doing to ensure that the interregnum is as short as possible.

It is absolutely clear that we have more to do to protect journalists in this country, which is why the Prime Minister asked me to set up the defending democracy taskforce. The hon. Lady will understand that there has been only a slight moment between the taskforce being established and today, so we will be coming up with further options shortly.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. In a recent Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting, I heard from journalists working with the BBC Persian service that they have also been threatened, as have their families in Iran. This is totally unacceptable, as the freedom of the press is fundamental in this country. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he is working closely with our security services to counter the threats and protect these brave journalists and their families in Iran?

**Tom Tugendhat:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that those in Iran deserve the same protection. It is absolutely wrong to target the families of journalists who happen to be still in that country, and for people to be punished for merely speaking the truth; it is quite a tragic violation not just of international norms, but of the culture that Iran gave us over many thousands of years. The words of Saadi that we are all *banī ādam*—all sons of Adam—and therefore all have the same rights, are in stark opposition to the actions of the vile regime in Tehran.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): The UK must always act to ensure press freedom and the safety of journalists, who have played a pivotal role in publicising human rights abuses in Iran and across the globe. Our intelligence services do an extraordinary job, but in the light of the Intelligence and Security Committee's recent complaints about the agencies not meeting their own deadlines, which has delayed the Committee's inquiry into the security threats posed by Iran, what discussions has the Security Minister had with the heads of MI5, MI6 and GCHQ to ensure that there are no further delays to the Committee's work?

**Tom Tugendhat:** I spoke to the head of MI5 only this afternoon; I will leave it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to answer for the other two agencies. It is incredibly important to make sure appropriate information is available quickly and in a timely fashion for the Intelligence and Security Committee, and I know it is conducting a very important inquiry—indeed I believe witnesses will be appearing before it in a week or two.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend said: "We know that the Iranian intelligence services work with organised criminal gangs." Mindful of the fact that Colonel Gaddafi's terrorists used to work quite closely with the Provisional IRA, is my right hon. Friend able to say whether there are indications that such links are happening between Iranian terrorists and home-grown terrorists?

**Tom Tugendhat:** My right hon. Friend will understand that I would rather answer that question before the Committee on which he sits than comment on the Floor of the House, but he will be aware that there are, very sadly, many different connections between criminal enterprises and terrorist groups and indeed hostile states. That is why countering state threats is about not just defending ourselves against hostile adversaries but ensuring that we are free from fraud and the abuse of crime in our communities.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and completely agree with the sentiments expressed by him and the shadow Minister with regard to the violation of our sovereignty: these are very serious matters indeed. I want to ask about a slightly wider but connected point: I understand that he will be limited in what he can say, but may I seek his assurance that his Department remains hypervigilant with respect to the activities of other states who may also seek to conduct operations against UK-based personnel?

**Tom Tugendhat:** Yes, is the answer. The reality is that state-based threats have increased in the last few years, and we know the obvious sources of such aggression—sadly, they have been written all too large on the global map. However, other states that are not so well-advertised have also been exploiting our freedoms and liberties to further their ends, and we will stop them.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Earlier this month I met with BBC Persian journalists to hear about the challenges they face in reporting on the Iranian regime's horrific human rights abuses, and around the world journalists are increasingly under threat for seeking to tell the truth and it is shocking that this is now the case in the UK. Is the Minister satisfied that the steps he has outlined today will protect press freedoms so that this situation is not repeated and UK-based journalists such as Iran International are able to operate safely and freely? When does he expect his taskforce to report back on extra security measures to be put in place?

**Tom Tugendhat:** I welcome that question. No, I am not satisfied; the reality is that there is more to do. That is exactly why the Prime Minister asked me to set up the taskforce; the Prime Minister himself is not satisfied. We will be coming forward with a series of options in respect of the integrated review, and from there a decision will have to be taken by the Government, and it will be a wider call. But the hon. Gentleman can be assured that the entire Government—including the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary—are absolutely committed.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): I send my solidarity and support to all BBC Persian journalists, who continue to speak truth to power in the face of adversity. The UK must act to ensure the safety of journalists, who have played a vital role in publicising human rights offences in Iran. The National Union of Journalists has called on police and Government to act swiftly and robustly, with assassination attempts and threats against UK-based journalists. What are the Government doing to protect press freedoms?

**Tom Tugendhat:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that there is more we can do, and I am very glad the NUJ is supporting this. The NUJ has formerly worked extremely closely with groups like Reporters Without Borders, which has done enormously important work in defending journalism around the world. This Government are absolutely committed not just to supporting journalists here at home, but to making sure journalists can be free around the world, which is why the Government, and in former years the Foreign Office, have supported various different projects for journalistic freedom around the world.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement and, as always, for his and our Government's determination to maintain freedom and protect safety. I would be grateful if he assured us of the Government's commitment, which I am sure they hold, to supporting a free press in countries where freedom of religion or belief is regularly and violently violated. We are seeing serious repercussions for those who speak out about injustice in countries where freedom of religion or belief is a concern, with Iran being a priority concern. The regime in Iran is violent, brutal, bloodthirsty and guilty of some of the worst crimes in the world. What assessment has the Minister made of the crackdown on media reporting and freedom of religion and belief?

**Tom Tugendhat:** The hon. Gentleman will understand that I answer for the Home Office, not the Foreign Office, so I will not give an assessment of Iran other than to say that that brutal regime has murdered LGBTQ communities. It has murdered Jews. It has murdered Muslims. It has murdered Christians. It has murdered Baha'is. It has murdered, frankly, pretty much anybody it can get its hands on. Tragically, it has conducted a regime of terror against women who refuse to be told what to wear. It is a regime that has violated so many principles not just of international law, as I said, but of Persian culture. It is an absolute abomination and this Government stand in full solidarity with those who are defending their human rights and we absolutely stand for freedom of religion and belief.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister referred to the Charity Commission's inquiry into the Islamic Centre of England and its links with the Iranian regime, but he will also be aware of wider concerns about other cultural centres across the UK, including in Manchester, allegedly having links to the regime and allegedly controlled by Khamenei. Would the Government consider a wider investigation of those outposts—those cultural centres—so that we can get to the bottom of this and get to the truth?

**Tom Tugendhat:** The hon. Member will understand that I am not going to list all those that are linked to the Khamenei authority, but he can be assured that the Islamic Centre of England is not the only one that I am aware of.

## Ukraine

5.26 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

This week, the war that President Putin expected to last just three days reaches a year in duration. Russian forces have killed thousands of Ukrainians. Eighteen million Ukrainians have left their homes. Thousands have been forcibly deported to Russia. Historic cities now lie in ruins. Russia has targeted hospitals, schools and energy supplies, and because of Russia's blockade of the Black sea ports and its economic blackmail, some of the world's poorest people are now paying higher prices for food, energy and the means of survival.

In the areas liberated from Russian forces, the Ukrainians have uncovered mass graves, as well as evidence of rape and torture on an unimaginable scale. Putin is responsible for this. His invasion was unprovoked and it was illegal. He could stop it at once by withdrawing his forces from Ukrainian land, but he is making the lives of millions of people hell for the sake of his imperial delusions. He blundered into a war that he cannot and will not win. Ukrainians were always going to resist a hostile attack aimed at wiping out their country.

Early last year, in New York, I predicted that if Putin were foolish enough to invade Ukraine, Ukrainians would defend their homeland ferociously, and I have been vindicated in that prediction. Today, they are more unified, more proud and more determined than ever. As President Zelensky said when he addressed my right hon. and hon. Friends and Members from across the House in Westminster Hall on 8 February, "freedom will win". We and the whole world remain united and resolute in our support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and for the defence of the UN charter.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): How resolute are we? Are we going to give them aeroplanes?

**James Cleverly:** I assure my right hon. Friend—I will make reference to this later on in my remarks—that the determination of the Ukrainian people is unbounded. I will talk about what further support we might give them later on in my speech.

The UK and Ukraine stand side by side in the face of this aggression. We have become the closest of friends and the most committed of partners. We are inspired by its heroism and by the resilience of the Ukrainian people. We come together as never before; we share a common purpose.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): When I go out in my constituency, I am struck, a year on, by the support of the British people. Despite the adversity they face with cost of living pressures, they still think this is the right thing to do. Does the Secretary of State agree?

**James Cleverly:** The British people, in every corner of the United Kingdom, have demonstrated a generosity of spirit that is admirable. That should make every single Member of this House proud.

[James Cleverly]

Ukraine's heroic armed forces have already recaptured thousands of square miles from the Russians, driving them out of more than half of all the territory it grabbed last year. But Putin shows no sign of withdrawing his forces. If we are to change his mind, Ukraine will need to take back more land. Today, the Russian army is on the defensive, morale is pitiful, casualties are immense, and its troops are running out of key weapons and ammunition. This is exactly the right moment for Ukraine to seize the advantage. That is why we and our allies must step up our effort to ensure that Ukraine wins this war and secures a lasting peace. Justice must be served on those responsible for war crimes and atrocities, in accordance with international law.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary has made an outstanding start to the debate. Last week, the Vice-President of the United States said that the US has formally determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity. Has His Majesty's Government now come formally to the same conclusion?

**James Cleverly:** We are looking very closely at the evidence that is being compiled. While we have not made a formal designation, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman, and other right hon. and hon. Members across the House, that we will ensure that those who are responsible for atrocities, whether in the field or right up to the desk of Vladimir Putin himself, will be held accountable.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary and welcome the Government's move to freeze the assets of Russians engaged in supporting the Putin regime. The EU has already set out a plan for how it will move frozen assets into a rebuilding programme for Ukraine. Our good friends and allies, the Canadians, have also set out in legislation how they will be doing that. What is causing the delay with respect to the UK? Why have we dithered while others have acted?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Gentleman is mistaken in his assessment of how far forward other countries are in this situation. We are all looking at how we can ensure—I will make reference to this later in my speech—that the people responsible for the damage will ultimately pay for the damage. The facts are that he is wrong about how far forward other nations are. On Canada, I discussed the issue with Foreign Minister Joly on my recent visit. We have a similar legal system and it is testing the legal parameters. We will, of course, learn from its experience.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Foreign Secretary very much for his positive response—we expect that and thank him for it. Reports are filtering through about systematic rape, abuse and sexual attacks on women of all ages, from as young as four to as old as 83. They are systematic and approved at the top of the Russian Government and their troops. On taking action and collating all the evidence to ensure that those perpetrating these depraved and evil acts are held accountable, I am sure the Foreign Secretary will give the House the assurance it needs, but we need it as a nation as well.

**James Cleverly:** That is an extremely important point, and one that, again, I will refer to later in my speech. I will say now, however, that when I visited Kyiv and Irpin and spoke with Ukrainians, and when I also spoke with Ukrainians during our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict conference here in London, the testimonies that I heard were genuinely heartbreaking, and I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the perpetrators will not go unpunished.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): As other Members have said, we are seeing terrible atrocities in Ukraine, and in retrospect this awful situation may be classified as a genocide. This is not the first time that Russia has undertaken a genocide; it did so in 1932-33 with the Holodomor, but we as a country do not recognise that as a genocide. I hope that when this is over—as soon as possible—we can look again at the Holodomor, in which millions of people were murdered, as they are being murdered now, and reclassify and recognise it formally as a genocide, as many other countries already do.

**James Cleverly:** That is another extremely important point, to which I referred when I made some brief comments to the press after my meeting with Foreign Minister Kuleba in Kyiv. It would obviously be wrong to prejudge how this is defined in the future, but we know, because we have heard Vladimir Putin say it himself, that his intention is to eradicate the whole concept of Ukraine.

**Sir John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**James Cleverly:** I will make some more progress, because a number of the interventions made so far have touched on points that I was planning to make in my speech, but I assure my right hon. Friend that I will give him an opportunity to intervene later.

Increased military support for Ukraine is the quickest and therefore the most humane way to end this war. I witnessed the extraordinary courage and resolve of the Ukrainian people when I travelled to Kyiv and Irpin three months ago: I saw for myself, and I understand fully, that they will defend themselves and their land whatever the cost may be. They will never give in. They will never surrender. Russia's untrained conscripts, sent to the frontline of a war that makes no sense to them, will never be able to match Ukraine's martial spirit. That is why Ukraine is going to win, and that is why we must ensure that it wins as quickly as possible.

The UK's military, humanitarian and economic support for Ukraine since the invasion started has reached nearly £4 billion. I pay tribute to, and commend, my right hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) for the decisiveness and resolve, in the early stage of this conflict, which gave the Ukrainians a fighting chance, enabled them to defend their capital city, and bought them the time they needed to push back the Russian forces. I am very glad that both my right hon. Friends are present.

We are proud to be the largest supplier of military aid to Ukraine, after the United States of America. We were the first country to provide the weapons that Ukraine



needed to defend itself. In 2023 we shall at the very least match the £2.3 billion of military aid that we gave last year, and we shall add more advanced capabilities across land, sea and air.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** My right hon. Friend referred to the importance of holding Russia to account for its crimes. He will be aware of the action that is already under way in both the International Criminal Court and in the Ukrainian judicial system, but can he confirm that the Government now support the establishment of a special international tribunal to pursue Russia for the crime of aggression?

**James Cleverly:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point. We have joined a working group to look at a special vehicle for full accountability, because, as I said in response to an earlier intervention, it is not enough just to hold to account the people committing the rapes, murders and brutality; we must ensure that those who are ordering them to do so and facilitating that brutality are also held to account.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to commend the heroism of the Ukrainian armed forces, which has been second to none. Our military aid is therefore absolutely paramount and we are right to give it. There is clearly a continent-wide challenge that embraces all of NATO around our ammunition supplies and our ability to sustain the war effort in Ukraine in the way that is going to be required. Can he commit that we are reassessing as a matter of urgency our defence stocks, which must be severely depleted at this juncture, to make sure that we can sustain the effort, however long it takes?

**James Cleverly:** My right hon. Friend is right to say that we need to support the Ukrainians until they are victorious. I have made the point on the international stage, including at the Munich security conference at the tail end of last week and over the weekend, that this equipment and this ammunition is to be used to fight in that theatre against that enemy. We are lucky that the young men and women who are conducting that fight are Ukrainians rather than British. We therefore have an enhanced duty to ensure that they are successful. I say to anyone in the international community or among our allies who is thinking of holding back their stocks for a rainy day: this is the rainy day.

**Dr Luke Evans:** Leading on from that, Biden has pledged a further \$500 million for weapons, and we have given £2.3 billion from here. What message do we have for our European colleagues and those across the world on supporting us to come forward and make sure that Ukraine is successful?

**James Cleverly:** I have had this conversation with NATO allies and others. This is not just about ensuring that Ukraine can defend its sovereignty, territory and people; as I will come on to later in my remarks, this is about defending the UN charter and the international order that has kept us safe since the end of the last war. All countries that believe in defending those principles should make every effort to assist Ukraine at this time.

We will give the Ukrainian forces the upper hand on the battlefield so that they can reverse Russia's gains and limit Putin's ability to target civilian infrastructure. We must also develop their force structures and capability so that they can build a deterrence force for the future. Over the last six months we have trained 10,000 Ukrainian troops to bring them up to battle readiness, and we will upskill a further 20,000 this year. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced last week, we will train Ukrainian fast jet pilots and marines as part of a long-term investment in their military capabilities.

When the Prime Minister and President Zelensky met earlier this month, they underscored our joint determination to achieve a just and sustainable peace. We shall work together in international organisations to achieve that, and to defend the principles of the UN charter. I am travelling to New York this week to speak on Ukraine in the UN Security Council. I will tell the truth about Putin's brutality and Ukraine's heroism, but we must always increase our efforts, with partners, to tackle the steady drip of poisonous Russian propaganda and lies. We will work together to help Ukrainian grain to reach world markets. The Black sea grain initiative and the Grain from Ukraine initiative boost food security for the world's most vulnerable people.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. On the subject of training pilots, the aircraft that we have—the Lightning and the Typhoon—are totally incompatible with fighting in Ukraine. They require large sustainment and they operate from bases well away from in theatre. The aircraft that could be ideal is the Gripen, which the Swedes have. We do not have the people to train the pilots and we do not have the aircraft or the simulators on which to do it, so I am slightly concerned when the Foreign Secretary says that we are going to train pilots. I wonder how we will do it.

**James Cleverly:** As my right hon. and gallant Friend knows, I am a good, old-fashioned team gunner, so I understand ballistic artillery and very little else, but I am assured by my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary, in close co-ordination with our Ukrainian friends, that the training contribution we are making is genuinely valuable and very much valued.

**Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): It is said that war is easy but peace is hard, which ignores the fact that war is never easy and that peace is a light we must all attempt to pursue to avoid an escalation of hostilities. The Secretary of State will be aware that the devastation caused by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria will have an impact on our ability to maintain the Black sea grain deal. What support is being offered to Turkey, and what is the UN doing to secure the position of food supplies to the rest of the world?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is not directly linked to the subject of this debate, but I can reassure him that I have been in regular contact with the Turkish Foreign Minister with regard to our ongoing support to Turkey and north-west Syria as they attempt to deal with the terrible consequences of the earthquake. I committed to keeping the House informed in my urgent statement, and I will make sure I do.

**Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**James Cleverly:** Given the number of people in the Chamber, I will try to make progress before taking another intervention.

In addition to our £2.3 billion of military support, we are providing more than £1.6 billion of non-military assistance, some £1.35 billion in lending guarantees through the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, £100 million in direct budgetary assistance and £220 million in humanitarian support.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Talking about gunnery, the Ukrainians are managing to maintain barrages of between 5,000 and 6,000 shells and rockets a day—they are probably receiving barrages of 20,000 a day from the Russians—which is equivalent to a small NATO country's annual procurement before the war. Is my right hon. Friend confident that we and the Americans have the industrial capacity not only to maintain our current level of support to the Ukrainians but to increase it without diminishing our own stocks, which are getting fiendishly low?

**James Cleverly:** The simple truth is that we have to make sure we provide the Ukrainians with the ammunition they need to get the job done. Our industrial base will have to step up a gear, I have no doubt, but we should be confident that our NATO allies, including the industrial might of the United States of America, will considerably outmatch the capability of the Russian Federation to produce ammunition.

I give the House notice that I now intend to make progress. Our vital humanitarian assistance, delivered through the United Nations, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations, is saving lives and helping to protect the most vulnerable in Ukraine and those forced to flee Russian attacks. The ongoing attacks on civilian infrastructure underscore Putin's increasing desperation, and we have provided £22 million in direct support to Ukraine's energy sector. This includes £7 million for more than 850 generators to ensure vital facilities such as hospitals have power.

**Duncan Baker:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**James Cleverly:** I will make progress.

And we are providing £5 million for safety and security equipment for the civil nuclear sector.

We are working closely with international partners to reduce their energy dependence on Russia. The UK phased out Russian coal from August 2022 and banned imports of Russian liquefied natural gas from the start of this year. In December, alongside the G7 and Australia, we set a price cap on seaborne Russian crude oil to restrict Putin's primary source of revenue for his illegal war. Despite elevated oil prices, Russia's Finance Ministry has reported a \$47 billion deficit in 2022, because of the decisive action we have taken. We will continue to work with partners to cut off Russia's hydrocarbon revenues and accelerate the global transition to clean, reliable sources of power.

We have also imposed our largest and most severe package of sanctions ever against Russia. With our allies, we have frozen more than £275 billion-worth

of Russian assets; in addition to the 1,200 individuals already sanctioned, we will introduce new measures against those in Russia and outside it who are supporting or profiteering from this war. We will crack down ruthlessly on those who seek to evade sanctions.

Abuses and violations of human rights have been committed by Russian forces on a systematic scale: torture and killing of civilians; rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war; and forced deportations. We will not allow these crimes to go unpunished. We will support the war crimes investigations, those of both the Ukrainian authorities and the International Criminal Court. In March, the UK will host a major international meeting to support the ICC in investigating alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

When this war is over, Ukraine can never again be left vulnerable to attack. A strong Ukraine must be safe, flourishing and prosperous. With our Ukrainian friends, we will co-host the 2023 Ukraine recovery conference on 21 and 22 June, here in London. Together, we plan to mobilise the combined might of public and private finance to ensure that Ukraine gets the vital reconstruction investment that it needs. I know that this House will join me in calling on Putin to withdraw Russian forces from Ukrainian territory and immediately bring an end to the barbaric attacks against civilians. The Ukrainians have endured months of relentless attacks and bombardment, but their spirit is unbroken. We share their determination that Putin's illegal attempted invasion will fail and this House demands that justice be done.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

5.52 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): One year ago, we gathered in this Chamber fearing the worst. Alongside the shadow Defence Secretary, I had just returned from Kyiv. Russian forces were massed on Ukraine's border, the intelligence picture was bleak, and the spectre of tanks rolling across the borders of 21st century Europe seemed both inconceivable and yet imminent. 24 February 2022 was a dark day for Europe. That morning, President Putin launched the largest conflict on our continent since the second world war. This illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of choice has left tens of thousands dead; millions displaced from their homes; billions-worth of damage inflicted on Ukraine's infrastructure; families torn apart; landmines strewn across once golden fields; and the dark trail of atrocities pockmarking the Ukrainian countryside.

Putin believed this would be a short war. He thought it would be an easy war. He thought that Ukraine would fold without a fight, perhaps because, in his warped world view, he thought these Russian invaders would be welcomed as liberators. He thought the west was weak and divided, but he was wrong on every count. Instead, Putin's folly has been met with unity and strength. Ukrainians have paid a bitter price for this war, but they have defended their land with courage, ingenuity and that relentless commitment that comes from a righteous cause. Russia stands isolated and condemned on the international stage, its economy hamstrung by severe sanctions. NATO, rather than weakened, has been strengthened and invigorated, with new members poised to join. The transatlantic alliance has stayed united and this House, too, has stood united.



That was the message that President Zelensky received when he visited Westminster. It was a message that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) took to Kyiv personally last week: Britain stands united behind Ukraine. In that spirit, I want to pay tribute to the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary and our two former Prime Ministers, who deserve credit for the roles they have played. On Britain's military help to Ukraine and on reinforcing NATO allies, the Government have had and will continue to have Labour's fullest support.

**Duncan Baker:** This is pertinent because the Leader of the Opposition was not the only Member of Parliament in Ukraine last week, as I was there. Along with six constituents, I took 112 generators to the people of Ukraine. We have worked tirelessly since December to raise nearly £40,000 to take aid there. There was a bomb the night we were in Lviv, but luckily we were all safe. On our return journey, we took a little girl, her mother and their pet back to the UK, to a host family in Guildford, because they had had their home destroyed. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that this Government have done an awful lot of work to help the people of Ukraine, but will he also pay tribute to everyday men and women, throughout the entire UK, including my constituents, who have literally given up their day jobs to raise money and take humanitarian aid to the people of Ukraine, with whom they stand shoulder to shoulder? I can say now that the resolve and bravery of the people we met and the aid agency is unshakeable.

**Mr Lammy:** The hon. Gentleman is right: in sometimes fractious times in our country, the spirit of the British people and their generosity has known no bounds. Their compassion is humbling and their desire to continue to stand steadfast alongside the Ukrainian people is a tribute to our nation. We can also all be proud of the role our armed forces are playing in training Ukrainian forces. We can be proud of the contribution of our diplomats and our brilliant ambassador, Melinda Simmons, on the ground in Kyiv. As has been said, we can be proud of the way British families have opened their homes to Ukrainians fleeing war and supported their cause from home.

Putin's war in Ukraine marks the end of the post-cold war era and we need a new mindset for these challenging times. The past year has illustrated some hard lessons. First, it has laid bare how naive and complacent we have been about Russian malign intent in this country and others. The invasion exposed a decade of chronic inaction against dirty money from Russia and other authoritarian states, which saw Kremlin-linked oligarchs and kleptocrats use London as both the hiding place and service industry for their ill-gotten gains. It should never have taken the invasion of Ukraine for us to act and although some progress has been made, the job is far from done. Labour will continue to hold the Government to account until Britain is no longer a soft touch for illicit finance.

Secondly, as the Defence Secretary himself conceded, for a decade we have hollowed out and underfunded our armed forces. Many in Europe believed that the era of wars between states was over. We reshaped our security, defence, intelligence and diplomacy to tackle different threats, allowing core capabilities to dwindle. Even when Putin broke international law and invaded

his neighbours, our responses were weak. That must change, beginning with the immediate need for a stockpiles strategy to sustain support for Ukraine and rearm Britain.

**Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** As someone, not alone, who has called on both Front Benches for a very long time to commit to spend 3% of GDP on defence—a figure that we were still spending in the mid-1990s after the end of the cold war—I am used to hearing people say that we need to spend more when they are not in a position to do so. Could the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that if he were in a position of power, we would reach 3% of GDP as a minimum on defence?

**Mr Lammy:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee for all that he has said on this issue over many years. We in my party have committed to a defence review on day one if we were to come to office. I gently remind him that throughout our previous period in office, spending on defence per capita was higher than today, standing at 2.5% when we left office. We are seeing what is happening across the European continent—so many European countries are committed to spending more, including the 3% that he indicates. We must play our part alongside France, as 50% of Europe's defence capability.

**Mr Dhesis:** My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary will be aware of reports of Russian attempts to subvert Moldovan democracy and interfere in its political institutions. That could have far-reaching consequences for the war in Ukraine and for broader European security. Does he agree that the UK Government must act urgently to support Moldova and its democracy before the situation worsens?

**Mr Lammy:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of Moldova and its vulnerability at this time. I fully suspect that other Members will return to this issue in the course of the debate. Moldova is feeling very worried one year on from the start of the war. We must stand with them. My hon. Friend is right to refer to the cyber-terrorism alongside it that has become a benchmark of Putin's aggression.

Thirdly, we must never again allow ourselves to become dependent on autocrats and their fossil fuels for our energy. Decarbonisation is now a vital national security imperative. The faster we can transition to clean power, the quicker we can undermine Putin's war effort. Every solar panel is a shield to Putin's aggression; every wind farm a defence against dependency. In developing our home-grown energy systems we can build the green jobs and the transformational industry of the future.

Fourthly, we are reminded of the essential relationship with our European allies. We have shared interests, shared geography and common values with our neighbours in Europe. NATO will always be the anchor of our defence and the cornerstone of European security, but it is more important than ever that we have strong diplomatic partnerships with our European allies and a close, co-operative relationship with the EU itself. This is too serious a time to be starting unnecessary fights or engaging in petty diplomatic squabbles.

[Mr Lammy]

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the war, it is obvious that we are entering a new and dangerous phase. Last week, NATO and western intelligence agencies warned that Putin had started amassing fighter jets and helicopters near the Ukrainian border—a sign that as we enter spring, Putin is adopting a new approach to the war that could see greater use of Russian air power to support its faltering land offensive. In recent days, both Ukrainian and NATO officials have warned of ammunition shortages, dwindling domestic stockpiles and supply chains under increased pressure. If Ukraine is to prevail over what Putin will throw at it, the UK and our allies should set aside individual announcements and instead lay out a long-term strategy to provide the support that Ukraine needs, whether it be ammunition, additional air defence capabilities or NATO-standard weaponry.

We need to ensure that Ukraine has our total support to tackle the Russian threat from air and land. Alongside that military assistance, we need a new diplomatic drive to sustain and broaden the diplomatic coalition against this war. Russia's invasion was an attack not just on Ukraine but on the international order itself. It is perhaps the most egregious violation of the UN charter since it was written: a sovereign UN member invaded by a permanent member of the Security Council.

We need to work with Ukraine and partners around the world to make clear the truth of this war and counter Putin's propaganda; to make it clear that it is Russia that has chosen this war; it is Russia that is the aggressor; it is Russia that is willing to use global hunger as a bargaining chip; it is Russia that is trying to change international borders through force. We will be less secure if that aggression is allowed to succeed.

Our support for Ukraine must entail action at home as well as abroad. At home here in the UK, we must complete the job and get our own house in order. That means tackling Putin's kleptocracy, closing the loopholes that continue to exist in our sanctions regime and properly enforcing our own laws on illicit finance. We will go still further. Russian rockets and Iranian drones have destroyed Ukraine's hospitals, energy plants and homes. Whole villages, towns and cities have been reduced to dust, rubble and ruin. By some estimates, the damage to infrastructure is more than \$100 billion. Without proper funding, the essential task of rebuilding Ukraine will take decades to complete.

As long ago as July 2022, the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), said that the Government supported using frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine. But since then, we have heard nothing. Sure, the right hon. Lady will refer to that in her speech later. The EU has already set out a plan to shift frozen assets into a fund to help rebuild Ukraine. As has been said, Canada has already legislated to do that, so why have our Government not done the same? Ukrainians do not have the luxury of time. This is an urgent point, so I ask the Foreign Secretary once more: what steps have this Government taken since July 2022 to ensure that seized Russian state assets can be used for the benefit of Ukraine? Further, will the Government support the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Sir Chris Bryant), which would allow Russian state assets to be used for that same purpose?

Throughout the horrific last 12 months, the body of evidence of Russian war crimes in Ukraine has grown and grown. On a weekly basis we hear horrific reports of mass graves discovered in liberated areas. On the TV, we see sickening videos of schools, hospitals and churches bombed to destruction, and innocent civilians murdered and tortured. These crimes demand accountability and they demand justice. We strongly support all international efforts to document, investigate and prosecute these crimes. Again, we believe we should go further.

Since March, Labour has been calling on the Government to support the creation of a special tribunal to prosecute Putin and his top brass for the crime of aggression. The Foreign Secretary knows that, while the International Criminal Court can investigate war crimes committed in Ukraine, it cannot investigate Russia for the crime of aggression. Only a special tribunal, working alongside the ICC, can ensure that this gap of accountability is bridged. The Ukrainian people want this tribunal. Zelensky wants this tribunal. The EU Commission wants this tribunal. France, Germany, Estonia, Latvia and countless others have called for it. So will the Foreign Secretary commit to its creation and, if so, what steps has he taken to make it happen?

Finally, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated more clearly than ever before how our security is connected with the security of the rest of Europe. The past 12 months have shown vividly what can be achieved when we stand united with our allies on the other side of the channel.

**Liam Byrne:** My right hon. Friend is making a brilliant speech. Was he as surprised as I was that there was so little mention of that kind of threat in the Integrated Review? Does he support the call that the next iteration of that Integrated Review absolutely has to put the re-containment of Russia centre stage?

**Mr Lammy:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has been crystal clear on that from the Back Benches. We await that review, but what he says has to be central. We must get it right. Obviously, we will scrutinise it in every detail. In many of the areas that have been critical to supporting Ukraine defend herself against Russia—sanctions, energy security and defence—our co-operation with the European Union has been critical—it has been critical to our support for Ukraine and, through that, Ukraine's survival. It is more important than ever that we have strong structured mechanisms for dialogue and co-operation with our allies in Europe. That is why Labour has proposed a new UK-EU security pact that could cover deeper co-operation on foreign policy, defence, security and law enforcement.

Labour's commitment to NATO is unshakeable, yet the UK's leadership in NATO could be at risk, with growing concerns over our capacity to meet NATO's obligations in full. While 20 NATO nations have revised their defence strategies since the start of the invasion, this Government have not done so, so I ask the Foreign Secretary: will the Government commit to rebooting our defence plans, and will they halt their planned cuts to the British Army?

**Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab):** I support all that has been said about the need for a long-term plan to defeat Putin and to see justice done. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that we should heed the calls of not only

Ukrainian civil society to provide more support for their lawyers and judges on the ground so that they can hear the tens of thousands of cases in Ukrainian courts, but the calls for psycho-social support for those Ukrainians who are going through trauma and who will need to be supported once Putin has been defeated?

**Mr Lammy:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. Earlier last month, I spent time with women in Kosovo, who reminded me of the horrors of war and sexual violence. In their own pain, they told me about the work that they were doing to help their Ukrainian sisters at this desperate time. It reminded me of the importance of that psycho-social support and the huge humanitarian effort in which we and others must play a part, not just over the next months, but for many, many years to come.

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** Inevitably, some people will flee the Russian advance that is coming in the spring, and some might reach the United Kingdom. Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that proper provision must be made to welcome them and also to find permanent accommodation for them if necessary?

**Mr Lammy:** The hon. Gentleman is right. It is why so many British people have opened their homes to Ukrainians at this desperate time. Of course, as this new offensive begins, there will most likely be further need over the coming months.

It is important to stress that this war did not begin for the Ukrainians one year ago. In fact, it began in 2014 when Putin moved into the Donbas and when he annexed Crimea. One year ago, we hoped for the best, yet, faced with what seemed like unsurmountable odds, we feared the worst, but Ukraine stands defiant. The price Ukrainians have paid for their continued freedom is immense: tens of thousands of people lost; cities destroyed; and families shattered. While Ukraine stands tall, Putin stands condemned and isolated. While Ukraine has won the admiration and respect of the world, Putin's ego has made Russia a pariah. While Putin expected the west to fracture and divide, his actions have drawn us together. But we cannot become complacent. In the coming weeks and months, Ukraine will yet again face new challenges and hardships designed by Putin to test her resolve and the resolve of us all. It is our duty to the people of Ukraine to do all we can to ensure that the country overcomes these challenges, in the same way that it has all the others. Ukraine must and will prevail.

6.15 pm

**Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con):** I pay tribute to the Foreign Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary for the quality of their speeches this afternoon.

In the year since Vladimir Putin launched his vicious and unnecessary war in Ukraine he has failed in almost all of his objectives. He has failed to take Kyiv. He has been sent scuttling from the Kharkiv region. He has been forced to evacuate Kherson. He has cost the lives of at least 60,000 Russian troops, and seen probably more than 100,000 injured. In the areas that he has occupied in Ukraine, he has created a new Flanders Fields of mud, trenches and blasted trees, where months of high-intensity shelling and bloodshed produced gains that

could be measured in yards. He has been forced to such desperate expedients as sending to the front prisoners or terrified members of ethnic minorities recruited from remote provinces. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out in his powerful speech, he is running pitifully low on the technically advanced weaponry that he increasingly needs.

The seemingly irresistible force of the Russian military is breaking on the immovable object of Ukrainian resistance. We in this House remain lost in admiration for the Ukrainians, for their heroism and for the continued inspiration that they are given by Volodymyr Zelensky. Yet it remains all too possible that Putin can still achieve something that he can call a victory. All that he needs to do is hang on to some piece of land that he has conquered and the signal will go around the world that aggression can pay, and that borders can be changed by force. All he needs to do to claim some kind of victory is to continue the cynical policy that he has followed since the first invasion of 2014, which the shadow Foreign Secretary rightly dwelt on, to use his foothold in Ukraine to destabilise the whole country.

Unless Putin is purged from Ukrainian territory, he will twist his knife in the wound. He will bide his time. He will wait until he can attack again. He will continue to menace the lives of the Georgians, the Moldovans—as the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) rightly pointed out—the Balts, and everyone living in the periphery of the old Soviet empire. Unless he is finally defeated in Ukraine, Putin's revanchist ambitions will be unchecked. That is why it is so crucial that we now accelerate our support for Ukraine and give them the tools to finish the job. We can all be proud of what successive Governments have done to help the Ukrainians whose armed forces continue to fight like lions. Indeed, it is they who deserve the credit, but we should be in no doubt that western equipment has been invaluable.

The story of the past 12 months is that, sooner or later, having exhausted all the other options, we give them what they need—from anti-tank missiles to HIMARS to tanks. If the choice is sooner or later, then, for heaven's sake, let us give these weapons sooner. It is absurd for western supporters to keep pressing the Ukrainians, as they did at the Munich security conference, on how long this is going to take; the answer to that question is to a large extent determined by us.

It is a fine thing that we have finally promised tanks, but there is no conceivable ground for delay in getting them to Ukraine. We need those machines—Abrams, Challengers, Leopards—to make a real difference in real time in the next few weeks, not next year. It is admirable that we are proposing to train Ukrainian fighters to fly NATO fast jets—I hear the caution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart)—but it is curious that we are doing so before we have even taken the decision in principle to give them the planes. Let us cut to the chase and give them the planes too. If the House was in any doubt about the urgency of increasing our supply of equipment to the Ukrainians, it is becoming ever clearer that China is preparing to arm the Russians.

The Ukrainians have shown what they can do. They have the élan and the courage to sweep Putin from their lands, and they have the inestimable psychological advantage that they are fighting for hearth and home. With the right kit, including more long-range artillery, they can



[*Boris Johnson*]

punch through the land bridge, cut off Crimea and deal a knockout blow to Putin's plans, and they should not stop there.

It is time for us all to end our obfuscation about what we think of as a Ukrainian victory and what we think of as Ukraine. The Ukrainians must be helped to restore not just the borders of 24 February last year, but the 1991 borders on which they voted for independence. It was the west's collective weakness in 2014, its effective acquiescence in Putin's aggression, that helped to convince him that he could launch an attack last year. Whatever the good intentions of the Normandy format, we cannot say that it was a success; nor, frankly, can we say that the UK was right to absent ourselves from that format and from those discussions. We must not make that mistake again.

After a year of slaughter, we must do more collectively to show the people of Russia what they are losing by Putin's misrule. We should tighten the sanctions on oil and gas wherever we can. I hear the arguments that hon. Members make about the need to use frozen assets and, whatever the complexities, I think the House deserves to hear those arguments properly thrashed out. We should be making it clear to Putin's entire war machine, as well as to the regime in the Kremlin, that they will be held to account for their crimes, for the torture, rape, and indiscriminate killing they have sponsored. We must show them that the mills of justice grind slowly, but they grind small.

We should designate Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, placing that country where it now rightly belongs on the list that includes Cuba, North Korea and Syria—and, by the way, we should designate the infamous and bloodthirsty Wagner Group a foreign terrorist organisation. That is a badge that is now richly deserved and long overdue.

**Liam Byrne:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Boris Johnson:** I am just winding up.

Above all, we must give the Ukrainians what they need to win this war this year. By ensuring that Ukraine wins and Putin fails, we are making the best and most financially efficient investment in the long-term security of not just the Euro-Atlantic area, but the whole world. We all know that we in this country made a promise to Ukraine under the 1994 Budapest memorandum, when the Ukrainians gave up their vast nuclear arsenal. We said we would come to their aid in the event of an attack. Now is the time, finally, to do what we can to honour that promise. The Ukrainians are fighting not just for their freedom, but for the cause of freedom around the world. We should give them what they need, not next month, not next year, but now.

6.23 pm

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): I start by echoing much of what has been said. It is very rare for us in this place to be in accord with one another—would that it was not the case that we had to talk about this at all, but it is, and on Ukraine we are in full accord.

I want to touch on some international comparisons. Estonia proposes an EU-wide ammunition purchase programme for supplying Ukraine. It would not have to

be through the EU—pan-European or pan-NATO is probably a more helpful term in this legislature—but we need something to increase the co-ordination and depth of the ongoing ammunition delivery programme. I do not want in any way to undermine that which has been achieved, but it is quite clear that Russia is looking to prosecute a war of attrition for a very long time, and it would be helpful to demonstrate to the Kremlin that the west will meet that with renewed resurgence in its supplies to Ukraine.

Of course, doing so depletes the United Kingdom's defence supplies and the supply chain has been caught short. That is not their fault, but the fault of a slightly less than strategic defence procurement plan—dating back many Defence Procurement Ministers, I hasten to add. We must ensure that we step that up at renewed pace. Interestingly, Norway has passed a five-year, £6.15 billion Ukraine support package and the terms on which it will be expended will be decided in concert with those in Ukraine. I wonder whether the UK should seek to emulate that, with ringfenced, dedicated funds over the next five years to send, again, a strong message.

I am not suggesting to the Foreign Secretary that the UK has not chipped in—of course it has, with many billions of pounds and no small measure of moral support as well—but such measures would help to show Putin that we are not going away and we are not shrinking from the challenge, however he wishes to present it. Canada, as other hon. Members have touched on, has changed its law to allow the seizure of Russian funds and started the process of seizing a first batch of frozen funds to send to Ukraine. The UK should follow suit in short order.

What progress has the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office made with our friends in India, to demonstrate to them that it is not acceptable to ride two horses in this way and that Russia's criminality cannot just be dealt with by turning a blind eye or holding their nose on the altar of cheap oil prices? It is either in the rules-based international system, or it is not; I wonder whether that information has been conveyed to India in the most robust terms by the United Kingdom.

China is a concern. We in the west need to develop a narrative that goes beyond cultural differences, that is not open to interpretation and that lays out extremely clearly to Beijing that, if it were ever to make the miscalculation to supply Russia with arms, munitions and other supplies that would help it to prolong this egregious invasion of Ukraine, that would be met with very significant consequences from the west. I would be interested to know what the United Kingdom Government are doing in that respect.

I will get on to air power in a minute, but the threat of escalation by Russia is material and we should concentrate closely on it. Over the last 12 months we have, perhaps understandably, mithered over the definition of whether something is lethal or defensive, whether it is tactical or strategic, and now, we have moved that on to air power. Ukraine has received an extraordinarily large amount of financial support and military assistance, but there is a pattern perhaps coming into view whereby Ukraine gets the weapons it was previously asking for while it is asking for the next set of weapons. We should redouble our focus on what, whether or which we can do to support Ukraine with air power.



In terms of logistics, as I have mentioned, the west, or certainly the United Kingdom, is running out of surplus or even stores in ready use and further equipment purchases will need to be made. However, I do not have confidence that the supply chain of the defence procurement apparatus as it exists currently in the United Kingdom is up to that job. I would welcome any reassurance that the Secretary of State can give me in that regard.

We should commit to a multi-year spending package of ringfenced money to support Ukraine; again, that would provide the clearest possible message. I am pleased, to a certain extent, that the United Kingdom is training combat pilots for Ukraine, but I am left wondering to what end. I also wonder what is happening to the combat pilots in training with the Royal Air Force, some of whom—I am not making this up—are having to wait eight or even nine years to become qualified. What is the knock-on effect of training Ukraine's combat air pilots? That is not to say that it is not the right thing to do, but every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and we should see the whole picture before we celebrate perhaps prematurely.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The fast-jet training programme that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, which is known as the military flying training system, is broken and everyone involved in aviation knows it. But we also have some tranche 1 Typhoons that have a lot of time left in their airframes and are sitting in a warehouse having been taken out of RAF service. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if given to the Ukrainians, a squadron of those could do a lot more to defend freedom, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) suggested a few moments ago, than it could sitting in a warehouse gathering dust?

**Dave Doogan:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. He asks whether I agree with him, and I am afraid that I do not. My understanding is that although tranche 1 Typhoons may have hours left, by the time the penalty factor for what they did when they were flying is applied, there would not be many hours left. They may look like Typhoons, but their combat air systems are very old, and they are perhaps not exactly what Ukraine is looking for. That is nevertheless a valid point, and it leads me directly to my next point.

Not a single Typhoon in the United Kingdom is available for use by Ukraine, which makes me wonder what we are training its pilots on—unless we are training them on NATO combat air standard protocol. That is all we can do, because they will not be getting Typhoons—mark my words—and they do not actually want Typhoons. People talk about getting pilots for Ukraine, but pilots are just the tip of the arrowhead. They need maintenance crews, avionics specialists, refuellers and armourers. The logistic tail for a fourth-generation combat aircraft is enormously long, and none is quite as long as the Typhoon's. What Ukraine actually needs is something more akin to the Gripen or the F-16, and the United Kingdom does not have any of those. That means that the United Kingdom is just part of the puzzle of working with allies in NATO and in Europe. The Gripen in particular is ideally suited to the types of facilities that Ukraine will be able to operate from.

The Secretary of State said that Ukraine must “take back more land.” I wonder how he intends for Ukraine

to do that without exercising air superiority. There will be a spring offensive, as I think most Members agree. We need to make sure that that offensive belongs to Ukraine.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I remind all Members that if they take part in the debate—not in an intervention but in a speech—they will be expected to be here for the wind-ups. I call Liz Truss.

6.32 pm

**Elizabeth Truss** (South West Norfolk) (Con): One year ago on Friday, I got a phone call, at 3.30 in the morning, from my private secretary at the Foreign Office telling me that Vladimir Putin had begun a whole-scale invasion into Ukraine. Air strikes and a land invasion were targeting cities across that country, including Kyiv. It was devastating news, but although it was devastating, it was not unexpected. We had been seeing for months the way in which troops were being amassed on the border of Ukraine. We had very good intelligence showing us exactly what Putin's plans had been.

We tried for months to forestall that invasion. At the Liverpool G7 summit back in 2021, we worked with our allies to come up with a package of severe sanctions, and we warned Russia that they would be put in place in the event of an invasion. For the first time in our history, we unveiled intelligence about what the Russians were planning. They were planning to install a puppet regime in Kyiv; they were planning to install false flag operations, with a view to trying to convince the world that it was not their fault that they had invaded Ukraine and that they had been provoked. Our intelligence prevented the world from believing that.

From 2015, we started training Ukrainian troops. We were also the first European country to supply weapons to Ukraine. We called out Russia internationally. I personally visited Moscow—as did many of my counterparts—to give directly to Sergey Lavrov and others in the Russian Administration the message of the severe consequences of their actions. Nevertheless, Putin went ahead. Despite the warnings, despite what he knew would happen, he went ahead, because fundamentally, he did not believe that the Ukrainians would fight, and he did not believe that the free world would have the resolve to stand up to him. He was proven wrong in both cases.

From day one, we saw sheer bravery on the part of the Ukrainians defending their country. We saw an Administration in Kyiv whom many people had expected to leave their posts—people expected Zelensky and his Cabinet to flee the country—but they did not; they stayed there. I remember being in a videoconference that evening with the Defence Secretary, and our counterparts, who were not in Poland or the United States but in Kyiv. They were defending their country and asking us for our help in what we could do.

We did all that we could. Together with our allies, not just in the G7 but from around the world—everywhere from Australia and Singapore to Switzerland—we put on the toughest sanctions. We pushed back the Russian economy by decades. We also supplied weapons to Ukraine. Many in this Chamber have said that maybe we should have supplied weapons earlier, but I can tell them—from working inside the Government—that we did all we could, as quickly as we could, to persuade allies, and we have now built up an alliance of countries

[Elizabeth Truss]

supplying those weapons. I cannot wait to see tanks and fighter jets in Ukraine helping those brave Ukrainians. We also co-ordinated with our allies an international response. At the United Nations, 141 countries stood up against the Russian invasion and what Russia had done—that, too, was unprecedented.

But let us all be honest: we should have done more earlier. The reason why Putin took the action that he did was that he did not believe that we would follow through. And we did not take him at his word. As far back as 2007, at the Munich security conference, Putin made his intentions very clear. He has talked on many occasions about creating a greater Russia. He took action, as we know, in Crimea and the Donbas, but we did not do enough. We let it pass; we collectively turned too much of a blind eye. I am afraid to say that we—not just the United Kingdom, but Europe and the free world—also imported Russian gas and oil. We saw money flow in from Russia—money that was later to be used to buy the weapons that would be used against the Ukrainian people. We also failed to take action on defending Ukraine.

As my colleague the Member for Uxbridge—[*Interruption.*] I apologise; as my right hon. Friend Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—let us be honest, I should have more respect after everything—commented earlier, we signed the 1994 Budapest memorandum, which guaranteed the security of Ukraine. We should have provided more weapons to Ukraine and we should have allowed Ukraine to join NATO. Can we imagine this situation if Ukraine had been a NATO member under article 5 protection? It would simply not have happened.

**Bob Stewart:** The 1994 Budapest accord, which guaranteed the sovereignty of Ukraine, was also signed by Russia, so Russia is to blame as well.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I completely agree with my right hon. Friend that Russia is, of course, to blame, but we should hold ourselves to high standards and follow through on the commitments that we make, as should our allies such as the United States.

There is unfinished business in terms of offering Ukraine the security that it needed, which is why we need to learn the lessons of what happened. Frankly, we were complacent about freedom and democracy after the cold war: we were told that it was the end of history, that freedom and democracy were guaranteed, and that we could carry on living our lives without worrying about what else had happened. We were told that there would be no challenge to those basic principles and that we had won the argument. We know now that that argument is never finally won. We need to keep winning the argument, and we need to keep defending our values with hard security and economic security, if we are to succeed.

First, we need to do all we can to make sure that Ukraine wins this war as soon as possible. Every extra day means lives lost, women violated and towns destroyed. We need to do all we can, as fast as we can—in my view, that includes fighter jets. We have had a discussion today about which are the best possible options, but having spoken to the Ukrainians about it months ago, I know that what they want is an option. Let us work

with our allies to get them an option to use, otherwise they will not be able to prevail. We also need to make sure that Ukraine has the economic wherewithal to continue the fight and that we are continuing to support it internationally.

Secondly, we must not be complacent when that war is won. I do believe that Ukraine will win the war—there is no way that Russia will win the war—but we need to make sure that the future of Russia is a more positive future than the one that we enabled at the end of the cold war. What does that mean? It means that we should never again be complacent in the face of Russian money and Russian oil and gas. Instead, we should make sure that any lifting of sanctions is tied to reform in Russia. We can never again have the situation where we enable freedom and free trade between the west and Russia, and that is then used to develop a kleptocracy, which is exactly what we have seen take place.

We need to make sure that Russia pays for the crimes that it has committed and that it is held to account for the appalling atrocities and war crimes—all of them. We need to make sure that money seized from the Russian state is used to rebuild Ukraine. That is vital. Of course, we in well-off countries such as Britain should contribute, but I cannot imagine a situation where Russia simply goes ahead as if nothing has happened and does not contribute to rebuilding Ukraine. That is vital and I will be pushing for it to happen.

Thirdly, we need to learn the lesson about how we deal with authoritarian regimes more broadly. President Xi has made very clear his intentions with respect to Taiwan. We have to take those seriously. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict—the invasion by Russia of Ukraine—we have amassed, for the first time in history, a group of nations that is prepared to put on sanctions and act together. We need to formalise this grouping, which I have described as an economic NATO—the G7 plus our key allies, such as the EU, South Korea and Australia. We need to bring that group together and start developing our plans now because, although we ended up doing those things after the invasion of Ukraine, prevention is far better than cure. Let us develop these economic tools and let us be clear with China exactly what would happen if there was an escalation with respect to Taiwan. Let us be clear about that now.

Let us also make sure that Taiwan can defend itself. Let us not leave another free democracy undefended for an authoritarian regime to invade. That is a very important principle. The reality is that, as a proportion of the world's population, fewer people are living under democracy now than 30 years ago. Can we imagine what the world will look like in 30 years' time if we do not act now? It is not a world that I want to live in.

We have heard some excellent contributions to the debate and I am pleased about the unity that we have seen and continue to see across the United Kingdom. We need to do all we can to support Ukraine and we need to act as quickly as possible. I am familiar with the vagaries of the Government machine, after spending 10 years in various Government Departments, so I will do all I can to support my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in his efforts to make sure that things happen as quickly as possible.

We also must not forget the broader arguments. Freedom and democracy are the lifeblood of our society and other free societies around the world. We need to be

prepared to do all we can to defend them now, before it is too late. The fact is that being tough is what will bring us peace, and that is what we need to do.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I also welcome our friends from Washington in the United States of America, who are in the Gallery. You are most welcome to our proceedings today.

6.47 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a great privilege to follow the excellent speech of the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), as well as that of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy).

I will add three points to the debate: first, on the importance of how we break the balance of force that we see arranged on the ground; secondly, on how we choke the oligarchs of war who are helping to supply Putin's war machine; and thirdly, on how we commence the pursuit of justice. There is more to say about that, because I was unhappy to hear the Foreign Secretary, who is just leaving his place, not row in behind the Vice President of the United States and say that our Government had also arrived at the conclusion that Russia was committing crimes against humanity. One has to ask, how much more evidence do they really need?

We have heard the call loud and clear from two former Prime Ministers about the need to supply what Ukraine needs now. The truth is that both sides of the conflict will find it difficult to summon the 400,000 to 500,000 troops necessary to make a breakthrough one way or the other, so the challenge that may lie ahead is that Ukraine continues to suffer the pattern of more and more troops being thrown into infantry attacks under artillery fire in the east of the country and endless missile strikes on population centres. That is a grinding, terrible waste of life.

We have to leapfrog out of this bad habit that we have gotten into where first we say no, then we say yes, with an extended time period in between. On air defence, we said no to Patriot missiles until we said yes. On tanks, we said no until, months and months later, we said yes. Now, can we please just short-circuit the process and send the F-16s as fast as possible, with trained pilots? It is great to hear that we are training pilots, but at last week's Munich security conference there was a clear consensus among Democrats and Republicans to send a very clear message to the President of the United States that it was time that fast jets were sent to support our allies in Ukraine. We heard directly from President Zelensky, just a few yards from this Chamber, that the wings of freedom are needed today, so let us jump out of the no and get to yes as fast as possible.

**Mr Francois:** We gave 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine. Those are very capable tanks, but in and of themselves they will not change the whole course of the war. What they did do, however, was help unlock the delivery of hundreds of Leopards. What the Ukrainians really want are MiGs, which they are familiar with using, and F-16s. By the same argument, if we gave one squadron of older Typhoons that then unlocked hundreds of MiGs and F-16s, that would be worth doing, would it not?

**Liam Byrne:** Personally, I think it would, but my key point to those on the Treasury Front Bench is: can we please short-circuit the time it takes to get from no to yes? We have gone through this loop—this doom loop—at least twice before, so let us short-circuit the nonsense now and crack on with it. The Treasury Front Benchers will find that there is cross-party consensus on that question, so please just put the decision in front of us from the Dispatch Box. Last week, we heard from the head of the Ukrainian air force that those fast jets are needed now in order to change the balance of power on the battlefield, but also to protect the population centres from Iranian drones as well as Russian cruise missiles. Every single day that we do not take that decision is a day when Putin is allowed to continue raining terror down, not just on the troops of the brave Ukrainian armed forces, but on the civilians of Ukraine. He is using that capability now to perpetrate war crimes, and we in this country have a moral responsibility to damn well stop him.

Secondly, we have to move harder and faster to choke to death the oligarchs of war, starting with the dogs of war at the head of the Wagner Group. Frankly, we were too slow to implement the sanctions that we now have. I am glad that this House passed the measures with cross-party consent, basically allowing us to cut and paste the EU sanctions regime with a little bit of the American regime and to get that into place. It was a shame that it took the war in Ukraine to move a little further ahead with some of the anti-kleptocracy laws that we now have, but here we are—all progress is good.

There is clear evidence, however, that sanctions are being widely evaded, with goods and oil being exported to India and China, rebadged, and then re-exported from there. Given that the Treasury's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation thinks it is okay to issue sanction waivers to Prigozhin and his lawyers, I urge Treasury Front Benchers—together with the Americans, if necessary—to get a lot tougher in clamping down on that export and re-export business, because right now that business is supplying dollars that are buying weapons to support Putin.

The symbol of a different order of things has to be a radically different approach to taking on the Wagner Group. We know that today, the Wagner Group is recruiting from prisons—it is recruiting from all over. It is mobilising forces on the eastern front in Ukraine, and frankly, it has opened a second front against democracy in Russia as well. It is active in at least five countries and has business interests in at least another 15. It is short-circuiting the sanctions regime by trading in oil, manganese, gold and uranium—you name it—so it is a matter of concern to this House that we are woefully behind the sanctions regimes that the United States and the Europeans have put in place to suffocate Prigozhin and his forces.

**Mr Dhesi:** My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that we also need to try to rein in the Wagner Group's growing influence in Africa? It is having more and more of an impact on eroding democracy in many nations across the globe, so it is about time that our Government, working with allies, try to clamp down on that.

**Liam Byrne:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The right hon. Member for South West Norfolk talked about the need for a global alliance to defend democracy—well,



[Liam Byrne]

that global alliance has to extend to Africa. We should be concerned about the fact that the Wagner Group is now active in five countries and is poised to make something of a breakthrough in the Sahel after the French evacuation from Mali. Frankly, we should be getting a lot tougher on the Wagner Group, and that should start with a much more comprehensive sanctions regime. When the Minister winds up, I urge him to tell us that the Government will replicate the United States sanctions regime on 21 different individuals who are associated with the Wagner Group and on 16 different corporate entities. That is three times as many sanctions as we have against individuals or businesses associated with Prigozhin.

Let us go further. On 26 January, we heard a very clear pronouncement from our allies in the United States declaring the Wagner Group to be a proscribed organisation, because it is patently a transnational criminal organisation. That contrasts with the situation a couple of weeks ago, when the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who is not in his place, came before the Foreign Affairs Committee. We were grateful to him for doing so, because for some time the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence could not quite decide who was the Minister responsible for taking on the Wagner Group. In due course, the machine did its job and the poor Minister was summoned before us. He was not able to say when the Wagner Group was going to be sanctioned; indeed, he extracted himself from that line of questioning by saying, of course, that it was not his job but a matter for the Home Office—joined-up Government at its very best.

What we have at the moment is not good enough. We need a clear plan, a clear timetable and a clear commitment from the Minister responding today that the Wagner Group will be sanctioned here, just as it is in the United States of America. We need a clear commitment that the individuals who have been sanctioned by the Americans and the European Union will also be sanctioned here.

Finally, while we are at it, could we now end the complete scandal of the Treasury itself licensing sanction waivers for Russian warlords to fly lawyers from London to St Petersburg to summon up a case and to sue journalists such as Eliot Higgins in English courts? What a complete scandal. To top it all, Eliot Higgins was told last week that he is the security risk, and as such cannot be allowed to go to cinema showings of the new film about the brave Mr Navalny. What have we become when we are licensing English lawyers to sue English journalists in English courts? It is not good enough. It is an outrage and it needs to stop, and we need to send a clear signal from this House this afternoon that it ends now. While the Minister is at it, he might consider paying Mr Eliot Higgins's legal bills. This will surprise the House, but I am told that Mr Prigozhin has not paid his legal bills, which are about £116,000, while poor Mr Higgins has. He has had to cough up about £70,000, so perhaps the Government could do a little whip-round for Mr Higgins and supply an apology to him and to Bellingcat at the end of the debate.

We have to make sure that the weapons supplies are in place and that the sanctions regime is far more effective, and the third piece of the puzzle is that we

have to commence the search for justice. It is excellent that the United Kingdom has come together with its allies to ensure that there are prosecutions for war crimes, but many of us in this House will want to see prosecutions for the crime of aggression as well. The abuse that has been laid out has been appalling, with murder, torture, rape, deportation, executions, electrocutions and the crimes of Bucha. The sexual assault of a four-year-old child was reported to the United Nations last week. That is why all of us in this House today should welcome the statement by the vice-president of the United States last week that the US has formally determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity. We should make the same declaration ourselves. We should do it quickly, and I hope we will hear a gameplan for just that from the Minister at the end of the debate.

**Bob Stewart:** Speaking as someone who has given evidence in war crimes trials—five of them—the thing that really horrified me was that we only got a very small percentage of the people who carried out such crimes. I am talking about genocide and war against humanity. It was a percentage so small that it is almost impossible to measure. If we are going to do this properly, we have to put a heck of a lot of effort into having war crimes trials—almost more effort than with the Nuremberg trials and so on.

**Liam Byrne:** The whole of the House is grateful for the work of the right hon. and gallant Member, because we know that more people were prosecuted because of the work he did than otherwise would have been the case. He is absolutely right to say what he has said. It was 80 years ago that the free world came together to ensure the prosecution of the guilty at Nuremberg. The table of crimes presented was clear. It was crimes against humanity, and we should remind ourselves in this House exactly what that table of crimes entailed: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and persecution on political, racial and religious grounds. Those are precisely the crimes that President Putin has committed in Ukraine, and we must make sure, just as we did in Nuremberg, that the free world comes together once more to hold him, as well as his henchmen, to account.

7.1 pm

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): It is a matter of great satisfaction that we have American visitors present today to witness the absolute unity of outlook on both sides of this Chamber. It can never be stressed too often that three concepts lie at the heart of defence and security: deterrence, containment and the unpredictability of future conflicts. To give an example of the last, one has only to look at the exchange between the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and myself on the day of the invasion. I asked him:

“If, as appears likely, Ukraine gets overwhelmed, will we offer to give sanctuary to a Government in exile, pending Ukraine's future freedom?”

The then Prime Minister replied, quite sensibly:

“One of the points I made to President Zelensky this morning was that it might be necessary for him to find a safe place for him and his Cabinet to go.”—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2022; Vol. 709, c. 570.]

I was quite sensible in asking that question, and my right hon. Friend was quite sensible in giving that answer because, let us be frank, not many people—at



least, not many outside the Cabinet and Government of Ukraine—thought that Ukraine had much chance of resisting what appeared to be, and indeed was, a massive, albeit ill-conceived, onslaught against numerically far smaller forces. I said there are three concepts, and that is an example of the unpredictability of future warfare.

I remind amateur strategists, such as myself, in all parties, that just as we were not prepared for the successful resistance of Ukraine, we should not now become too complacent that Ukraine cannot possibly be defeated. We could wake up tomorrow to find that there has been some terrific, unexpected Russian breakthrough and the whole strategic situation has changed completely. That is why the appeals being made so strongly from both sides of the House are that we must, to coin someone coining someone else coining a phrase, “give them the tools to finish the job”.

It can be argued that deterrence failed, but why did deterrence fail in terms of Russia invading Ukraine? I am sorry to share this with friends from across the Atlantic, but one reason deterrence failed in this context was that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia came almost six months to the day from the catastrophic and bungled exit from Afghanistan by NATO. I am not saying that that planted the seed in Putin’s mind to do what he did, but it certainly may have affected the timing of him doing something that he had almost certainly wanted to do for a long time. We have to bear in mind what sort of signals we were sending. The answer is that we were sending signals of weakness, and when signals of weakness are sent to an authoritarian—that is the rather mild term used these days for what most of us from another era would call the totalitarian—type of government, we ought to know what to expect their behaviour to be.

I have talked about unpredictability and the limitations of deterrence. There is one element of deterrence—nuclear deterrence—where the results are more certain, should one dare put it to the test; but it nevertheless has to be considered in every scenario, no matter what sort of terrible fighting and atrocious behaviour may go on below the level of the nuclear threshold.

Let us talk a little bit about containment. Containment is what one has to do when faced with a deeply hostile opponent. It is no good talking about battling for “mutual understanding”. The trouble is, we can have mutual understanding where one person understands that the other person is a democrat and the democrat understands that the other person is a totalitarian dictator. That is not a recipe for peace; it is actually a sound portrayal of a situation where, unless the democrat shows the dictator that he cannot get his own way by force of arms, the dictator will try to get his own way by force of arms.

I have two other topics I shall touch on briefly in this contribution. One is to draw attention to an important analysis that appeared on the website “Desk Russie” on 30 December 2021, just two months before the invasion. It was by an old friend of mine whom I have known for the best part of 40 years. She is a brilliant French historian and former Sovietologist called Dr Françoise Thom. She drew attention to the texts of two draft treaties that were unveiled by the Russian Foreign Ministry on 17 December 2021. One was a draft treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation on security guarantees, and the other was a draft agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation

and the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It was made absolutely clear that these were take it or leave it offers. They were encapsulated by the deputy Foreign Minister Grushko, who said:

“The Europeans must also think about whether they want to avoid making their continent the scene of a military confrontation. They have a choice. Either they take seriously what is put on the table, or they face a military-technical alternative”—

that is war to the rest of us. This is a deputy Foreign Minister stating in terms that unless European states do what Russia wants, they can expect to be embroiled in armed conflict.

A former deputy Minister of Defence, Andrey Kartapolov, of the Duma Defence Committee, said as follows: “Our partners”—meaning our partners in the west—

“must understand that the longer they drag out the examination of our proposals and the adoption of real measures to create these guarantees, the greater the likelihood that they will suffer a pre-emptive strike.”

What was in those draft treaties? I will give the Chamber one example. Article 4 states, in part, that

“the Russian Federation and all participants which were, as of 27 May 1997, member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, shall not deploy their armed forces and armaments on the territory of any other European state in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997.”

What is the significance of 1997? Well it is this, Madam Deputy Speaker: it was only after 1997 that 14 of the present 30 members of NATO joined the alliance. Starting in 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined, and then almost a dozen more followed.

What the Russians were basically saying was that, unless America agrees to withdraw its support from all those newly freed democracies, and unless all NATO countries agree to withdraw their armed forces from all those NATO member countries, they can expect to find themselves in an armed conflict with Russia. The trouble is, statements of that sort do not get reported in the west as clearly as they should be—if they do at all. They are generally kept in, as it were, the specialised centres and the highly learned brains of people like Dr Françoise Thom.

I am basically saying that there are three outcomes when we get into a situation such as this. The first is that we can capitulate. The second is open warfare. The third is containment, otherwise known in the old days as cold war. I really resent it when people say, “Oh, you don’t want to go back to the cold war.” If the alternatives are capitulation or open warfare, then cold war is the very best we can do in staring down an aggressor.

I end where I began when intervening earlier to draw attention to the state of the UK’s defence budget, notwithstanding the considerable injection of cash that was made under the previous Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip. Even that only brought our percentage of defence expenditure up from about 2.1% of GDP to 2.3%.

A few years earlier, in 2015-16, there was a change in the accounting methods for calculating what our expenditure on defence was as a proportion of GDP. That was not an illegitimate change; it just led to us including certain items which NATO counts towards defence expenditure that we had not previously counted. If it had not been for that change in accounting, our expenditure on defence would not have been at 2.1%, which was what it was before the cash injection given by

[*Sir Julian Lewis*]

my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip; it would have been at 1.8%. My right hon. Friend's cash injection would have taken it up to 2.1%.

Under the old system of accounting, in the mid-1990s, we were still spending 3% of GDP on defence. At the height of the cold war, in the mid-1980s, as I have said time and again to this House, we regularly and consistently spent—under the old system of accounting—between 4.5% and 5% of GDP on defence. We hear talk of arguments between the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury on whether some extra billions will be made available. We all recognise that if Ukraine succeeds in defeating this aggression, while they will be doing it for their own benefit, they will benefit the whole of the western world. It will mean that the odds of us ever having to engage in that sort of fighting ourselves, against a regime of the sort there is in Russia, will be massively reduced.

Ask yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we would do if we found ourselves against our will forced into a conflict of that sort. Immediately, the amount we had to spend on defence would shoot up, not to 3% but probably to something like 10% or 15%. It would take every single scrap of effort, financially, economically and industrially, that this country could possibly generate. That is what always happens if we find ourselves in a war—not to mention all the costs in human life, treasure and misery. Therefore, this should be seen as an investment. If we increase our defence budget, we are investing in the freedom of Ukraine, and we are investing in the freedom and peace of the whole of the western world.

7.15 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), and to hear such unity across the House. A year on, this war will leave lasting imprints on every Ukrainian and, indeed, on world history. This time, and this milestone, will mean something different to every person affected by the war. Here today, we know that this moment shows that history will stand on the side of the Ukrainian people.

International security and the stability of the world order were threatened when Russian Federation forces began their invasion on 24 February 2022. While the future appeared uncertain, through the indescribable bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people, its military forces and its Government, Ukraine has exercised its power and turned what could have been a brief moment in time into an historic struggle for freedom.

I have spoken before in this place about the human impact of this war. In December, I visited Lviv, Kyiv, and the region of Kharkiv with the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). We joined the charity Siobhan's Trust, whose humanitarian aid reflects our core British values. Its work in feeding over 4,000 displaced Ukrainians every day is to be both admired and applauded. Everywhere we went, the real power of the Ukrainian people was clear to see. Putin's forces had inflicted horrific damage on their towns, cities and villages. I saw blocks of flats—people's homes—gutted by missile attacks in Kharkiv, schools destroyed in Slatyne, and homes peppered with shrapnel in Ruska Lozova.

One soldier told me about the horror of removing the dead bodies from bombed out buildings—mostly homes. He showed me a photograph of a dead little boy laid out on a bench. He told me that the boy's father had clung on to the boy with desperation and had had to be pulled from his son. In typical Ukrainian understatement, he said, "It's hard." He told me of his men who had found it too hard and had gone home and shot themselves. He worried for his men—men who urgently needed help in dealing with the impact of stress while still serving on the frontline. Despite the inhumanity of war, the Ukrainian people live with dignity and compassion as they fight on bravely towards victory.

I met with businesses that were working to keep Ukraine's economy functioning in the most challenging of circumstances, under bombing and planned power cuts. Businesses such as the potato factory have, despite the war, kept their investments in Ukraine. That is their contribution to the war effort: to keep the economy going, to provide food for the nation and jobs for workers, and to pay taxes to fund Ukraine's war efforts. Those people and businesses defy Putin's best efforts to crush the free spirit of Ukraine. They are essential to success in the war, and when the time comes, they will continue to support Ukraine as it flourishes again as a peaceful and independent state.

Of course, we must continue to support Ukraine by providing it with the necessary military capabilities. Equally, we must support the recovery effort. I praise the upcoming Ukraine recovery conference, jointly hosted by the UK Government and Ukraine, because no matter when the war ends, we must begin laying the foundations for structural and economic recovery now.

To close, everywhere I and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green went in Ukraine the same message was delivered to us: "Do not forget us!" Ukraine can claim astonishing victories already. The war may well continue, but Ukraine has achieved what many had once believed was impossible. For the last year, it has firmly withstood a hostile invading force intent on bringing democracy to its knees. History is being rewritten. History is being written by Ukraine. Freedom will win. Slava Ukraini!

7.20 pm

**Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): It is an honour to follow both the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) and the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who really brought this back down to the individual experience of a terrible war, for which I am grateful.

I am going to spend the next few minutes arguing that we should provide for war and prepare for peace. We in the UK should increase seriously our industrial production for defence—Ukraine's and our own—while also isolating Russia and seizing diplomatic opportunities when they arise. We could characterise this as better preparation and jaw-jaw. I would also like to identify a couple of events from the last century or so that can shine a light on the situation that Ukraine finds itself facing and that Ukraine's partners find ourselves facing: the 1915 shell crisis in Britain, and the 1999 withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces from Kosovo.

First, however, let us recall NATO's role in this war. In Russian propaganda now, Moscow is characterising this as NATO's war. The Kremlin suggests that the

Government in Kyiv is a puppet and that NATO is pulling the strings, but that could not be further from the truth. The provision of arms by Ukraine's partners, such as the UK, is often a reactive response to requests for support. I give credit to the British Government and credit to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Ministry of Defence for repeatedly stating that this is Ukraine's war. Ukraine is our close partner and we are supplying Ukraine with equipment and support, but contrary to Russian propaganda, this is not NATO's war and there is no sense in which NATO is threatening Russia.

However, we are not in the business of subcontracting policy to the Government in Kyiv. We should not be answering each and every request on this reactive basis. There are times when we should be supplying equipment proactively. For example, the British Government announced they would be supplying Warrior infantry fighting vehicles when asked, though the Liberal Democrats had been calling for this in the months prior to that announcement. We should anticipate requests by Ukraine, rather than wait for them to land. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) suggested that there is a pattern of saying no until we say yes, but the UK is rightly stepping up its provision at a time when we know that our allies have moved or are ready to move.

**Liam Byrne:** We may as well try to round out the cross-party consensus that I think is emerging. Would the hon. Member agree that we should be doing everything we can to send fast jets to Ukraine?

**Richard Foord:** I suggest to the right hon. Member that if we send fast jets to Ukraine, it is going to be a symbolic gesture. When he and I visited Kyiv last September, Minister Reznikov was asking for Gripen aircraft, as we have heard in this Chamber today. If we are to do so, it would not be because we have a capability that is particularly useful to Ukraine, but because it would be a symbolic first mover gesture that others can follow.

Another example of this is the provision of main battle tanks once we knew that other countries were at least considering or almost ready to provide them, but we must have greater anticipation of what demand will arise before it takes Zelensky to visit us to make such requests.

We have heard that Ukrainian forces are firing up to 5,000 artillery rounds per day. Ukraine's partners will struggle to maintain supply at that level from our existing stockpiles, and we are going to need to procure artillery rounds quickly. Just-in-time acquisition might play well on spreadsheets, but it has not played well in relation to our inventories.

There are times when matters of supply really are crucial. Britain found itself short of high explosive rounds in 1915. David Lloyd George was appointed the inaugural Minister for Munitions—a position that, when he became Prime Minister, he gave to his fellow Liberal Winston Churchill, who became Minister for Munitions in 1917—and the creation of a Ministry for Munitions indicated just how serious Britain was in prosecuting the war. I am not for a moment suggesting that we need to promote the Minister for Defence Procurement in such a way, but we do need to co-ordinate the purchase of munitions with our allies, given that we are drawing on the same western suppliers in many instances, and we need to do it on an enduring basis.

We see now that Russia is moving increasingly towards a total war footing, where it is increasingly mobilising the resources of its society and its economy to the war effort. It may have sought to play down the so-called special military operation last February, but it is increasingly having to recognise what it has created following the full-scale invasion. The time will eventually arrive for Ukrainian negotiation, and it should come from a position of strength for Ukraine. When the time comes for negotiation, we should be open to the leverage that Beijing will have with Moscow that NATO nations do not.

To illustrate that, recall how the orders were eventually given for the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces from Kosovo. Yugoslavia conceded when it realised that it was isolated. If we think about the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring and summer of 1999, NATO was bombing military sites across Serbia and Montenegro in pursuit of the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces. This followed ethnic cleansing that Yugoslav security forces had perpetrated against Kosovo Albanians. The NATO bombing campaign had gone on for more than 10 weeks, but there was no sign that Slobodan Milošević was prepared to concede and to withdraw Yugoslav military and paramilitary personnel from Kosovo.

The NATO enforcement action seemed to be stuck, and NATO bombing sorties were striking the same targets repeatedly. President Yeltsin played an important role in persuading Milošević to withdraw Yugoslav security forces from Kosovo. As Boris Yeltsin's Balkans envoy, Viktor Chernomyrdin communicated to Milošević that Belgrade could no longer depend on diplomatic support from an ally. Chernomyrdin was later to become a dreadful Russian ambassador to Ukraine, and he is rightly very unpopular in Ukraine, but he was successful in persuading Milošević that he had no ally to whom he could turn for support. Milošević chose to consent to the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces only when he realised just how isolated he was.

So let us not be too dismissive of China's offer before we know what it is. Of course, we should pay careful attention to the speech by President Xi coming up on Friday. It will probably be full of platitudes, and it may offer nothing except a ceasefire based on the current possession by Russian forces of Ukrainian land, in which case it would clearly be completely unacceptable. However, the current statements made by China relate to the importance of sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are not there yet, but China may have a role to play in pressuring Russia into its eventual withdrawal from Ukraine.

We would have such a discussion while not being naive about China's motives. Russia and China have been adversaries, so it might suit China to have Russia and the west depleting their weapons stockpiles in a conflict taking place far away from the Asian Indo-Pacific. However, it does not suit China to have the west threatening consequences against China, as Blinken has warned would result from the supply of arms by China to Russia. Russian people need to know that this is Russia's war. It is not NATO's war, nor is it China's war. We in the UK do need to prepare UK defence now as if this war is our own. We must supply Ukraine so that it can capture more of its territory before it seeks to enter into a ceasefire. At that point, we should be open to recognising the value that Russia's partners can have in persuading Putin to pull back.



7.29 pm

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) and Members from across the House.

I speak as a socialist, an anti-imperialist, and someone who feels disgust at the thought of war. It is not despite those values that I support the Ukrainian resistance; it is because of them. To me, socialism means self-determination for ordinary working people, not ceding power to tyrants seeking to oppress them. Anti-imperialism means opposing all states that seek to extend their power by dominating others, regardless of what flag they fly. It is impossible to talk about the war in Ukraine without addressing the bloody history of Russian imperialism. It is a history that our friends across eastern and northern Europe do not need to be reminded of. They know that what is at stake is not just lines on a map and whose flag flies above a town hall. No—a nation that survived the holodomor understands the invader's aims: the erasure of a people, the eradication of its culture and the destruction of its democracy.

It is easy to debate geopolitics from the comfort of London, but the stakes feel very different when I hear directly from someone sleeping in a bomb shelter. When I speak to workers, to trade unionists in Ukraine, or to refugees hoping to see their home again, their message is clear and heartfelt: don't abandon us. It would not be an anti-war stance to turn our backs on Ukraine. It would be sending a message to despots around the globe that war crimes pay. It would be accepting a global order based not on international law and respect for sovereignty, but on torture, murder and nuclear threats. The Ukrainian resistance is not asking us for thoughts and prayers. Solidarity means helping Ukraine to defend itself—and we can and must do more. Over 1,000 military vehicles were sold off by the Ministry of Defence last year. Why are we not donating them to Ukraine instead?

But of course, Putin does not just fight with tanks and missiles; he fights with disinformation and manipulation, flooding the internet with propaganda. Discouraging Ukraine's allies is a key part of his plan, and we will not fall for it. As the UK struggles with a painful cost of living crisis, Putin wants us to blame support for Ukraine, but while soaring energy bills are forcing workers into food banks, energy giants are popping champagne bottles, celebrating their record profits. Instead of giving up on solidarity, we must tax those who profit from war and misery.

If we talk about poverty, we must think about Ukraine too. After a year of relentless attack, the country is devastated and ordinary people are paying the price: its economy contracted by a third last year; inflation stands at 26%; and more than a quarter of people are unemployed. It will take years for the nation to heal and rebuild. And when Russian troops are finally pushed out, our solidarity cannot end. It is not enough to freeze Ukraine's debt; it must be cancelled. Let us close loopholes in our sanctions regime and liquidate seized assets to fund reconstruction.

Future economic support cannot come with conditions of brutal austerity. The international community must come together to support the rebuilding of Ukraine's public services, the creation of green jobs and the strengthening of its democracy. Decisions about the reconstruction

process cannot be made by oligarchs and foreign companies seeking to profit from it, but by the Ukrainian people themselves, with input from trade unions and civil society. Meanwhile, we must accept all refugees seeking safety from the war, and ensure their access to decent housing and the services they need.

To all Ukrainians in the UK today, I say: you're always welcome here and to call this country your home, but I know that is not what many of you want, so I hope—and sincerely believe—that soon you will be able to return to a free and peaceful Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

7.34 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. All speakers this afternoon have referred to the war, but I want to be more specific. My stance on Ukraine is well known in this Chamber and has been consistent, as has everybody else's: I believe we need to do more to support our allies in Ukraine. I said that before the visit of President Zelensky, who by his very nature inspires everyone he meets, and provides the leadership that Ukraine needs.

Russia's aggression must be halted, not simply for the lives destroyed in Ukraine, but for the message that must be sent. My heart aches as I watch the news and see lives torn apart in Ukraine, and as I look into the eyes of the refugees who have come from Ukraine to Northern Ireland and see their hurt. The eyes tell much when it comes to conveying the issues and how people feel. Through the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, I had occasion to visit Poland and see some of the conditions it offered. The refugees there never had to tell us anything about what they had been through; their eyes told us everything of their pain, suffering and memories.

In Northern Ireland, we have been pleased to take many refugees, but they have left their loved ones and their homes behind. As they wonder whether they will ever be able to go home and what that home will now look like, and as we see the bombs and the Russian destruction, it is clear that this House and our Government, perhaps with others, must step up and do more. In an intervention on the Secretary of State, I mentioned Russia's aggression and the systematic abuse carried out by Russian soldiers who have been given authority at the highest level of government—from generals right down. To give the House an idea, that systematic cruelty has included the rape and sexual abuse of women and girls, some as young as four and some as old as 83.

I would also like to draw attention to the violations of freedom of religion or belief. As Russia's invasion of Ukraine enters its second year, it is important to note that attacks on religious freedom and other human rights are escalating. Reports show that the Russian military have destroyed, damaged or looted at least 494 religious buildings, theological institutions and sacred sites in Ukraine since the start of the invasion last year. According to international humanitarian law, unjustifiable attacks against religious sites constitute war crimes; we in this place all recognise that.

Such attacks are happening in tandem with attacks on pastors and religious leaders in the region. The attacks are against not only the Ukrainian Orthodox believers and their churches, but evangelicals and evangelical



prayer houses—there are many home churches across Ukraine, especially in the east of the province—and Catholic, Jehovah’s Witnesses’, Jewish and Muslim sites.

The Institute for Religious Freedom has found that Russian forces have abducted Ukrainian pastors, and tried to enlist them as Russian spies and propagandists. Baptist churches have been systemically destroyed and damaged by bombs in the eastern part of Ukraine. Baptist pastors have gone missing over the last four to five years, and some have never been found; we question just what has happened to them. From 24 February to 15 July 2022, the institute recorded 20 cases of illegal imprisonment of Ukrainian religious leaders, accompanied by attempted rape; mock executions; deprivation of water, food and access to toilets; and threats of violence against not only Church leaders, but their families as well.

It is not only Ukrainians who suffer at Russia’s hands; Russia’s religious leaders who voice opposition to the war in Ukraine also fear for their lives. Moscow Patriarchate priest Aleksandr Dombrovsky fled Russia in January, shortly after the police told him the FSB had opened a criminal case against him. He had repeatedly preached against the war in Ukraine;

“Everything related to my anti-war position was recorded in a most thorough manner;”

he told Forum 18. That is just one of many cases where religious leaders are targeted and suffer for speaking the truth and in accordance with their conscience.

I want to put on record my thanks to our Government, our Ministers, and the former Prime Ministers who have both spoken in this Chamber today, the right hon. Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), for their strong stance on these issues; their leadership at that time inspired not just the United Kingdom but the rest of NATO and countries across the world to stand strong with Ukraine, and I thank them for that.

One thing is clear: we must not allow Russian aggression and Putin to beat us with this long-waged war. War fatigue is real, and I welcome President Biden’s commitment today to another \$500 million in military aid and the commitment from our Prime Minister and Government along those lines, but some of the other European countries should step up and match that.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) told us at an earlier time that he was in Ukraine about a month ago and that many soldiers were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The papers referred to that today, and I ask the Minister if we can do any more for soldiers who are suffering from PTSD, and who perhaps have war fatigue, because that is a real condition.

As our attention rightly goes to global emergencies such as the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from our commitment to Ukraine, and I trust the message today from this House is clear: we will not be deterred from helping our allies; we will continue to stand against Putin, and all the badness, evil and wickedness he represents; and it is not all quiet on this western front, where the battle is. We will be using our voices in this Chamber, munitions from our factories, and our voices elsewhere to continue to reject the invasion of Ukraine. In keeping with the Ukrainian spirit—that courage and inspiration they have given all of us across the world—we will not be beaten down; we will not give in to this despot.

7.41 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The grim reality is that war in Europe is no longer in our rear-view mirror; it is happening now. We are living through a bleak new chapter in the history of Europe as Putin seeks to destroy the sovereignty of our Ukrainian friends and to attack the principles of democracy that the rules-based world order is built on.

As the UK falls silent on Friday morning for a national moment of reflection for Ukraine, we are reminded of the devastating toll that this war has taken on the Ukrainian people: the tens of thousands of lives that have been needlessly lost; the families that have been torn apart and displaced from their homes, with over 100,000 of them now here in the UK; the women who have been raped and violated; the children who have been stolen by Russia; and with the economic and social fabric of the nation left in tatters.

There is the ongoing struggle for peace: it is the Ukrainians’ fight, but it is also our fight. Yet despite all the suffering and horror that Ukraine has endured, the flame of freedom burns bright in Kyiv: we need only look at the extraordinary resilience of the Ukrainian people in the face of Russian aggression that we have heard about in speeches from both sides of the House today, praising the skill, bravery and fortitude of the Ukrainian military to defend their homeland, and, as we heard from the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the incredible and inspiring leadership of President Zelensky. Just under a fortnight ago, Members in this House were privileged to hear from President Zelensky in his address in Westminster Hall. His speech moved us all and reminded us what is at stake.

Colleagues from across the House have made extraordinary contributions in this debate and I am saddened that more of us were not present to hear them. It is good to have two former Prime Ministers speaking in a debate; if I am honest, it is not normal for those two individuals to elicit cross-party support given the events of the past year, but there has been an extraordinary level of cross-party consensus in this debate. There is a unity that goes across political parties, across nations, and across our continent in our support for Ukraine and our determination that Putin must lose. That is a message Putin hoped would never be thought or shared, because he hoped to fracture the west and to change the united position we had to one of division where we turn against each other, and that has not happened.

**Bob Stewart:** I think I am the oldest person in this Chamber by a long way. I remember the Vietnam war, and the Americans were forced to withdraw from Vietnam by public pressure at home, largely. We have not talked in this debate about what is happening in Moscow and other parts of Russia, but it must be horrendous, with 60,000 dead, and with huge numbers returning with post-traumatic stress disorder, I am sure. We must put huge effort into getting through to the Russian people, to convince them that this war is not fair and not right and they should put huge pressure on their own Government to get rid of Putin and sort this out and withdraw. As the former Prime Minister my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has suggested or implied—perhaps he

[*Bob Stewart*]

will correct me—in the end we also must have a Russia that works and is a decent place for Russians to live, because Russian soldiers are just like our soldiers: they are doing their duty and they do not really have much choice.

**Luke Pollard:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. “You are what you eat”: that is true of food as it is of the media we consume, and the media the people of Russia are able and allowed to consume tell a very one-sided story. They tell a story only from the point of view of the Putin mouthpiece in the Kremlin. There is no challenge and no debate, so how we deal with misinformation and Putin’s deliberate calculation to deny his own people the truth is quite a challenge. We must address that in terms of information operations and how we tell a story, which the BBC World Service has been so good at, and which is a purpose for it now.

In this debate we heard about the UK’s past complacency in respect of Russian gas from the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), who, sadly, is not in her place at the moment. We also heard from Members on both sides of the House about why the Wagner Group should be listed as a terrorist organisation—it not just a sponsor of terrorism; it is the terrorism. If we do not act now, we will be repeating the mistakes of the past, because we are looking in the rear-view mirror to comment on what has happened when we should be looking forwards. We have seen what the Wagner Group has done in Syria and we see what it is doing in Ukraine, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) said, we can see what it could potentially be doing in Africa as well. So we need to hurry up and make that decision.

Putin’s criminal invasion of Ukraine is appalling, brutal, and unjust. Putin displays contempt for international institutions, humanitarian law and the rules of military conflict. Above all, Putin shows a callous disregard for human life, Ukrainian and Russian. He treats human life as nothing more than pawns to satisfy his monstrous ambitions, and that is why the Leader of the Opposition has said clearly that he should stand trial for his crimes at a special tribunal at The Hague.

As we know, Putin’s aim is not simply to take Ukraine. We are facing a tyrant ready to use his war to redraw the map of Europe. He wants to destroy the unity of the west, and one year on, as the former Prime Minister the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip has said, there is still no sign that any of Putin’s strategic aims have changed, but nor have they been achieved.

This war can only end in failure for Putin: he will fail because he miscalculated the incredible resolve of the Ukrainian people to defend their homeland; he will fail because he has underestimated the strength of resolve on these shores and across the west to support Ukraine for as long as it takes to defeat Russia; and he will fail because the millions of voices defending democracy will over time drown out the hate and division of tyrants and dictators.

The Government have had Labour’s fullest support on Britain’s military help to Ukraine. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said on his visit to Kyiv only a few days ago, for as long as Putin continues to wage this criminal war, the Government

will continue to have Labour’s fullest support, but as we head into the second year of this conflict there are several important questions that I would like to press the Minister on.

**Nadia Whittome:** Does my hon. friend agree that rather than the Ministry of Defence selling off 1,105 vehicles last year, either to authoritarian regimes or auctioned to private arms dealers, those vehicles should have been donated to Ukraine to support its resistance?

**Luke Pollard:** It is really important that when it comes to military disposals we look carefully at where the equipment goes. There has been good support for Ukraine so far, but we would like it to go further, which I think was the point my hon. Friend was trying to make.

As the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), said, although 25 NATO nations have rebooted their defence plans since the start of the invasion, the UK Government have yet to do so, despite Labour having been arguing for Ministers to reboot defence plans since last March. In next month’s review of the integrated review, and in the spring Budget, the Government must take the opportunity to move on from ad hoc announcements and set out a more systematic approach to support for Ukraine.

Will the Minister confirm when the Government will set out a full 2023 action plan for military, economic and diplomatic support to help to give Ukraine confidence in a sustained stream of future supplies, as Labour has consistently argued for? Will he also say whether now is still the right time, as he has suggested, for the Government to proceed with cuts to our armed forces before the integrated review reports? Will the Minister also reflect on calls from Members on both sides of the House to restrict the Wagner Group? My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) set it out clearly when he set the objective of suffocating the Wagner Group and closing the sanctions loopholes. There is cross-party support for that and I encourage the Minister to get on with it.

Let me turn briefly to the issue of stockpiles, which was raised by Government and Opposition Members. Labour Members welcome the £2.3 billion that the Government allocated for Ukraine last year and this year, and the £560 million to fill some of the empty stockpiles, but we need to be clear that that is not enough. There is an immediate need to replenish our stockpiles, which have been depleted in supporting Ukraine. To date, the Government have acted too slowly to replenish them. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough, the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) and the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) made that point quite clearly.

There is now a growing need to set out a clear stockpiles strategy to sustain support for Ukraine and re-arm Britain in the long term—a clear strategy that works with industry, allowing it to invest with certainty. We need to be certain, when we make a pledge to support our friends in Ukraine, that we have the industrial capability to honour that promise. That has been said by Members on both sides of the House. For example, in respect of the NLAW anti-tank missiles that have been vital to Ukraine, it took 287 days after the latest invasion before the MOD got its act together and

signed a new contract, and the first new NLAW will not come off the production line until 2024. We need to shift parts of our defence industry and MOD procurement to an urgent operational footing, both to support Ukraine for the long-term and to rebuild the UK's stocks for any future conflict.

Will the Minister set out how long it will take our armed forces and our industry partners to replenish UK stockpiles to ensure that we can defend our shores while honouring our commitments to Ukraine and NATO? If the UK is to be the first nation to send long-range missiles to Ukraine, as the Prime Minister stated in Munich, by what date will they be sent? Assuming that they will be Storm Shadow missiles, how will they be replaced and what is the plan? What plans is the Minister's Department making to urgently ramp up our own industry so that we are better equipped to deal with future conflicts? The Government have far too often raided the stockpile to make efficiency savings. That is a mistake that has now come home to roost and we need not to repeat it.

Russia is not a spent force, in spite of the huge damage that Ukraine has inflicted on its military. The spring offensive that is now perhaps only days or weeks away will see Russia massively expand its war effort. It is conscripting more people and, although it is sending them into a bloodbath that few of them will survive, against high-end western weaponry, the war could continue for a very long time. Only last week, NATO's Secretary-General said that

"we are seeing the start already"

of a new Russian offensive in Ukraine. Will the Minister update the House on whether the UK is on track to send the 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine in order to support Kyiv with the new spring offensive? How will they be supported in the field? It would be much easier for the Minister if he would agree to set out a long-term plan rather than making ad hoc announcements.

I pay tribute to all those people across the United Kingdom who have welcomed Ukrainian refugees into their homes and fundraised for them, and who have gone the extra mile to deliver supplies and aid to our friends in Ukraine themselves. This has been a huge undertaking. I also thank the officials in the Home Office who have helped to facilitate the Homes for Ukraine scheme, along with colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. But we need to recognise that there are now holes in those schemes that need to be filled. That is not a partisan critique; it is just about making something work properly. We need to look at those schemes properly to make sure that if the war continues, as I fear it may do, the support we can offer to those who have fled war can be consistent and long lasting.

The invasion of Ukraine did not start a year ago; it started nine years ago. We must learn the lessons from how we were complacent at that time, how the west was sleeping and how we effectively gave a dictator and tyrant in the Kremlin the green light by not taking stronger action. The UK must be prepared to support Ukraine for the long term, renewing our resolve in confronting Russian threats, pursuing Putin's crimes and standing with Ukraine. It is important to say that should there be a change of Government at the next general election, there will be no change in Britain's position of support for Ukraine. The phrase "never again" is said too often

in this House, but never again is now. We must rise to the same heights as our Ukrainian friends to ensure that Putin loses and Ukraine wins.

7.56 pm

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Alex Chalk):**

We have had a serious, sombre but spirited debate, as befits the subject at hand. There have been many powerful speeches—including from two former Prime Ministers, no less—and I will touch on a number of them in due course, but let me begin by noting a clear and overriding message that emerged from our deliberations: the solidarity from all sides of the House for our Ukrainian friends. Their sheer bloody-minded defiance in the face of unprovoked and brutal aggression has moved and inspired us all.

And it is indeed unprovoked and brutal aggression. History is littered with examples of conflicts where, in truth, it is far from clear which side has the better claim to the moral high ground. The issues are murky, facts are contested and arguments cut both ways. This is not such a conflict. Putin's actions—invading a sovereign country at peace with its neighbours and that posed no threat—are self-evidently morally bankrupt. They lack even a shred of justification. Indeed, Putin's pretext—namely, that the Jewish Ukrainian President was somehow a fascist—is as preposterous as it is desperate. No, the Kremlin's invasion is depraved, cruel, unnecessary and illegal. It is a war of choice that has brought needless death and destruction. It has taken thousands of lives and wrecked countless more, and it has brought appalling suffering to innocent people, including countless children. The world knows it. Ukraine knows it. Vladimir Putin knows it.

This debate has a special poignancy, coming as it does so close to the one-year point since the full-scale invasion. Until that first missile was launched into Ukraine, in truth many doubted that Putin's illegal invasion would actually happen. "Surely this is just sabre-rattling," they thought. It is important to note that it was this country, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), that worked with the United States to expose a cynical Kremlin plan for a false-flag attack involving fragments of unmanned aerial vehicles and staged casualties in Russian-occupied territory to set up the phoney pretext for an invasion.

On 17 February 2022, the Ministry of Defence published the first defence intelligence showing Putin's planned invasion routes, just as the Russian President was denying harbouring any such intention. By the date of the full-scale invasion, 22,000 Ukrainian service personnel had already been trained by British soldiers across land, sea and air. Weapons and ammunition, including the now-famous NLAWs made here in the UK, were already in the hands of the Ukrainian army, ready to defend that country from the onslaught to come. Indeed, the United Kingdom was the first European country to provide lethal aid. And how the Ukrainians used it. In those vital first few weeks, they used it to hold back the Russian flood. Russian soldiers, who had packed special uniforms for the expected victory parade, were stopped in their tracks and instead harried with an intensity and bravery that stunned the world. It was a feat of arms against overwhelming odds that takes its place in history.



[Alex Chalk]

Russian forces were pushed back in a great sweeping retreat, forced into a gruesome drive-by past the scene of their many crimes, not least Bucha, a name destined to forever stain the conscience of the Kremlin. Russian forces have now abandoned all territory west of the Dnipro river. At day 361, Russian forces are still not where they expected to be on day three. Meanwhile, the combat effectiveness of their army has been reduced by 40%. Nearly two-thirds of their modern tanks have been destroyed or disabled. Indeed, Putin's campaign appears to have failed to meet any of its operational and strategic objectives, while Ukraine has managed to wrestle back more than half of its stolen territory. Despite all the bombast, despite the continual indiscriminate assaults on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and despite the repeated human wave attacks with young men used as cannon fodder, Russia continues to fail. A little over a week and a half ago, a Russian brigade attacking Vuhledar was completely wiped out, losing more than 1,000 people in two days. Those figures must be added to the thousands and thousands that have gone before. The Russian military has suffered up to 200,000 casualties, including between 45,000 and 60,000 dead. That is the blood price of a perverse and ahistorical nationalist fantasy. Meanwhile, Putin breaks his army on the anvil of Ukrainian resistance.

Ukrainians are displaced, towns have been razed to the ground, and there are credible reports of rapes and the forced deportation of thousands of children. There were the harrowing accounts relayed by the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). She reminded us that some had said, "Don't forget us." We will not. Those responsible for unspeakable acts will have to answer for them. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) and the Minister of Justice and Security for the Netherlands will be hosting the Joint Ministerial Council in March to support the vital work of the Office of the Prosecutor in the International Criminal Court. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was right when he referred to systematic cruelty. Let that be exposed. Let those crimes be brought to justice. Let people pay for the cruelty and illegality they have perpetrated. Just as time and again Russia has reckoned without the courage, tenacity and ingenuity of Ukrainian people, so too did it underestimate the resolve and unity of the international community.

**Dean Russell (Watford) (Con):** Does the Minister agree that when Putin invaded Ukraine, he thought the west would look the other way? A year on, he is probably deluded in believing that we would be apathetic over time in our support for Ukraine. What the debate today shows, and what the minute's silence on Friday will show, is that we will never give up. Slava Ukraine.

**Alex Chalk:** My hon. Friend puts the point extremely well and I cannot improve on that. He is right. Today, NATO is stronger than ever. And by the way, it is not just NATO. We should not fall into the trap of assuming it is NATO. What about Australia, which is providing support to Ukrainians? What about the New Zealand troops here in the UK who are helping to train Ukrainians? Let us not give in to that Putinesque rhetoric and narrative. This is the world community coming together. It is a fact, however, that NATO is set to grow, with the accession of Sweden and Finland. The UK alone has

sanctioned almost 1,300 individuals and over 130 entities since the start of the invasion. Other countries have acted decisively, too. We have sanctioned the Wagner Group. We have sanctioned Yevgeny Prigozhin. We have sanctioned his family. We have sanctioned Dmitri Utkin. We have sanctioned Arkady Gostev, the director of the federal penitentiary service of the Russian Federation.

**Liam Byrne:** While the Minister is going through his list, would he be good enough to explain to the House why the Americans have sanctioned three times more people associated with the Wagner Group than we have? It is a simple question.

**Alex Chalk:** We have sanctioned the Wagner Group in its entirety, so there really is no place to hide. [Interruption.] Yes, we have. And there is no place to hide for those who aid, abet, counsel or procure the actions of the Wagner Group.

The UK has been amongst the foremost nations supporting Ukraine politically, militarily and with humanitarian assistance. It is worth taking a moment to consider what that support actually involves: over 100,000 rounds of ammunition and 5,000 anti-tank weapons. A point was made about armoured vehicles. The UK has provided over 200 armoured fighting vehicles, including some of the so-called dogs of war that saw service in Afghanistan: the Mastiffs, the Wolfhounds, the Ridgbacks and so on. That is what we have done, to say nothing of the winter weather gear, the Sea King helicopters and 3 million rounds of ammunition. All that we do, and more. We do it so that we send a message that might is not always right, that the international rules-based order stands up and stands for something, and that this country will meet aggression where we find it.

Last month, the Defence Secretary announced we would be sending Challenger 2 tanks and AS90 self-propelled guns. As I indicated, that comes after NLAWs, Javelins, Brimstone missiles, night-vision goggles, medical supplies, winter clothing, and search and rescue helicopters. The training for tank crews has already begun, and our armed forces are putting Ukrainian recruits through their paces in a range of crucial battlefield skills. I will just share this with the House. There are few more poignant sights than flying over the training grounds, with Ukrainian troops beneath, and seeing trenches scarred and etched into those fields of the United Kingdom. That is what this has become: trench warfare in parts of our continent.

In 2022, we trained 10,000 new troops. In 2023, we intend to double that number. As hon. Members will be aware, our armed forces will be training Ukrainian aviators to fly sophisticated NATO-standard fighters in future. We expect to begin training the first Ukrainian pilots in spring. We cannot supply the jet before we have trained the pilot and no time is being wasted in that endeavour. We have committed to match the £2.3 billion of military aid spent last year. We continue to lead the international military and diplomatic effort, too. As we saw with our tank donations, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) indicated, our role can be to have a force multiplier effect. We can catalyse the work of other nations. That is why the Prime Minister signed the London declaration with President Zelensky, cementing our unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and urging others to do the same.



There is much more I could talk about, but let me just come to this. On Friday, the nation will stand in silence to commemorate a year on from the invasion. As well as His Majesty the King sending his support to Ukraine, over 100 events will take place across Whitehall. This will be an opportunity to remember all those who have lost their lives and all those who have seen their lives irrevocably changed. It will be an opportunity to remember all those who continue to fight for their liberty. It will also be an opportunity to redouble our resolve, ensuring that when the time comes, that proud nation will build back stronger than before. That is why on 21 and 22 June the United Kingdom, jointly with Ukraine, will host the international Ukraine recovery conference.

The signal we are sending to Vladimir Putin could not be clearer. He has turned his country into a pariah and the most sanctioned nation on the planet. Meanwhile, the world stands with Ukraine, ready to support that proud and defiant country to defend its territory and its people. One year on, with Russia gearing up for a new offensive, Putin remains unrepentant. His only coherent war aims are for more war, more death and more suffering. His desperate hope is that the world will lose its nerve. It will not. Together we will defy him. Together we will prove him wrong. As President Zelensky told us in his stirring address to the House two weeks ago:

“We know freedom will win. We know Russia will lose. And we really know that victory will change the world”.

Slava Ukraini, heroyam slava.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

## Government Support for Breastfeeding and the 2023 Lancet Series

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Wood.)*

8.8 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have repeatedly brought matters to this House concerning infant feeding. For an issue that concerns every child ever born, it generally gets remarkably little attention from Governments. Madam Deputy Speaker, I can assure you that breastfeeding is an issue of the utmost importance. According to the World Health Organisation, breastfeeding has the potential to prevent 800,000 child deaths globally each year. As *The Lancet* paper editorial states:

“Breastfeeding has proven health benefits across high-income and low-income settings alike: it reduces childhood infectious diseases, mortality, and malnutrition, and the risk of later obesity; mothers who breastfeed have decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.”

Yet despite those clear health benefits, around the world and here in the UK, we see a growth and embedding of commercial milk formula in our culture.

I stress that this is not a criticism of individual parents, or a value judgment. This is not about formula versus breastfeeding; it is a structural issue, relating to recognition of the importance of breastfeeding and to the lax regulations that have allowed a commercial industry to flourish. The recently published *Lancet* papers tackle the structural reasons for which breastfeeding does or does not happen. Commercial milk formula is a multibillion-dollar industry which directly targets families with multifaceted and sophisticated marketing practices—practices that influence our beliefs and values, prey on our insecurities and weaknesses, and are exacerbated by the absence of comprehensive Government support for breastfeeding.

There are three *Lancet* papers, each highlighting the impact of several aspects of commercial milk formula marketing. The second states:

“The marketing of commercial milk formula...for use in the first 3 years of life has negatively altered the infant and young child feeding ecosystem.”

Successful breastfeeding depends on a network of policy and society responses. It is the responsibility of Government to regulate the industry, and to implement structural policies to mitigate the impact of formula marketing. Women who do breastfeed do so despite billions of pounds' worth of marketing designed specifically to undermine them.

However, this commercialisation does not just affect breastfed babies and their families. The cost of the marketing literally adds to the price of commercial formula on supermarket shelves. Research by Leicester Mammias—presented recently to the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities, which I chair—shows the influence of advertising, with many parents choosing the most heavily advertised first-stage formula rather than the cheapest. All first-stage formulas are exactly the same by law.

In 2018, the APPG produced a report highlighting the significant impact of the cost of commercial milk formula on family budgets. Inflationary pressures are much worse now than they were in 2018, with profound consequences. Feed UK has highlighted the increased

[Alison Thewliss]

costs in its own more recent research, and just yesterday an article in *The Guardian* revealed that supermarkets such as the Co-op are now keeping formula behind the counter to prevent shoplifting. It said:

“The cost of infant formula has soared over the past year - with the price of the cheapest brand increasing by 22%. Even if a parent is able to access the cheapest brand, Aldi’s own label, the cash value of Healthy Start vouchers, £8.50 a week, is no longer enough to pay for the amount of infant formula needed to safely feed a baby in the first six months of their life.”

That is a very difficult increase for many families to bear. The Minister should be concerned about the risks of parents’ watering down formula, feeding babies under a year old cows’ milk, or thickening milk with porridge because they simply cannot keep up with the spiralling costs of infant formula. Inadequate nutrition at an early stage can have devastating long-term health and developmental impacts. I have raised this matter with Ministers before, and I encourage them to take it seriously. I am presenting the debate this evening because I feel that it is important for the Government to engage meaningfully with the findings of *The Lancet* report.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for initiating the debate, and for the leadership that she brings to the APPG. Her voice on behalf of breastfeeding women throughout the United Kingdom has been welcome.

In Northern Ireland, our community midwives team are extremely focused on aiding breastfeeding, yet, as the hon. Lady will know, we have the lowest breastfeeding rates in the UK. Does she agree that providing breast-milk pumps for women in low-income families who are put off by the prohibitive cost of the pumping equipment, but who need their child to be minded after the end of their all too short maternity leave, may be a useful tool to help mums to realise that “breast is best” can work in tandem with their return to work?

**Alison Thewliss:** The provision of those pumps can indeed make a huge difference to working families by giving women the flexibility to return to work. Many of them want to breastfeed, but find that returning to work presents a barrier to it. I will say a little more about the pressures from maternity leave later in my speech.

In this post-Brexit landscape, health industry professionals are making it clear that there should be no reduction in regulation on commercial milk formula. Existing regulations should be maintained as a minimum, and work should be conducted to improve on them.

Let me now take a bit of time to discuss the different angles of the three papers. The first explores the challenges of breastfeeding in a market-driven context. Many of us will be familiar with the stress of having a newborn: are they feeding enough, too much, too little? Are we getting enough sleep? Why are they still crying? Commercial milk formula companies thrive on this self-doubt. They want to exploit what are normal developmental phases and present them as problems to which only they can provide a solution. Online forums and baby clubs, apps, emails and pop-up ads are rife. They consistently undermine parents’ confidence, so that a product can be sold as the answer to their problems. When you are exhausted and your baby has been crying for hours, commercial milk

formula companies are there to sell you a good night’s sleep, peace of mind, or a special type of formula to stop your baby fussing.

No one would judge parents in that position. We have all been there, and would gladly hand over all the money in our wallets to get that peace of mind. Companies have stepped into this space to offer specialist formulas in a quite unregulated way: formulas sit on the supermarket shelf offering solutions to colic and spitting up, for “hungry babies”, and to deal with allergies. The truth is, however, that there is no solution—not one that comes in a tin, anyway. Fussing and crying and disrupted sleep patterns are all extremely normal parts of human development and baby behaviour. Normal sleep patterns of babies sadly do not align with the sleep patterns of adults, no matter how they are fed. The responsibility lies on us, as policymakers, to ensure that parents are informed and helped to make the best choices for their babies. We need to ensure that any vacuum of information is not filled by aggressive marketing.

The second paper looks at the marketing playbook used by commercial milk formula companies. I should say at the outset that I am not arguing that marketing is inherently bad, or that companies should not make profits, but there is a case for an overhaul of the regulations. When marketing impacts human development and health outcomes to such an extent, Governments need to step up to the plate.

Commercial milk formula sales were worth \$55.6 billion in 2019. Let me put that figure in context: it far exceeds the Scottish Government’s budget in the same year. Sales per capita have increased substantially across the world over the last decade. There are many reasons for that—poor breastfeeding support, work constraints, perceived issues with milk supply or fussiness—but the major contributor is marketing. Between \$2.6 billion and \$3.5 billion is spent on milk formula marketing every year, and that is likely to be the tip of the iceberg, because it does not include the costs of lobbying, social media or sponsorship of health workers, all of which are key entry points in shaping beliefs and altering consumer decisions. Industry lobby groups work to influence policy environments in favour of the milk formula industry and their shareholders.

Medical professionals are targeted as well, through deliberate efforts by formula companies to encourage the diagnosis of health issues which they claim that their products can alleviate. Dr Chris van Tulleken is among several health professionals who have explained how this has led to over-diagnosis of health issues such as cows’ milk protein allergy, an activity that is being led by formula companies presenting their products as a “solution” to normal baby behaviour. He found that, astonishingly, between

“2006 and 2016, prescriptions of specialist formula milks for infants with CMPA increased by nearly 500% from 105,029 to over 600,000, while NHS spending on these products increased by nearly 700% from £8.1m to over £60m annually.”

There is little evidence to suggest that prevalence has increased, but it is clear from those figures that industry influence has. This is a cost to the NHS of which the Government should be mindful.

The report finds that the World Health Organisation’s “The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes” has been routinely blocked, reinterpreted, circumvented, or ignored entirely in order for companies

to achieve astronomical profits. One example is the creation of follow-on milks as a response to the marketing constraints that do exist: they are completely unnecessary, and often contain additional harmful sugars. The aim is to sell them to promote first-stage formulas that cannot be advertised on television. In the UK, the existing regulations are poorly enforced, and could well end up being scrapped in the bonfire of regulation that is the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. I seek an assurance from the Government that that will not happen. I also ask the Government to use their voice at the meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission to tighten regulations globally, instead of allowing industry to have its own way.

The third paper highlights the way in which the political economy influences breastfeeding outcomes. The paper finds that inadequate maternity rights and poor working conditions make it difficult for many mothers to breastfeed, and, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), a rise in insecure and underpaid work has made it even more difficult. There is evidence from around the world that where Governments fail to protect maternity rights, formula companies thrive.

This paper highlights how women's labour is systematically undervalued. If a tin of formula is purchased in a shop, that contributes to GDP figures, which the Government record as an expression of national wealth. If that same baby is breastfed, it does not count towards GDP because women's time is just not valued the same way as a commercial product. The paper found that if we were to put a monetary value on the milk produced by breastfeeding women globally, it would amount to an astonishing \$3.6 trillion. Commercial milk formula companies are aware of that, and this report exposes how their interests are aligned with poorer maternity protections. The incentives and resources are there for lobbying companies to persuade Governments to reduce workplace rights. This acts as a distortion on the labour market and needs to be actively resisted.

Scotland has legislation specifically protecting breastfeeding in public, for which I thank the former Labour MSP Elaine Smith. The SNP Scottish Government also put breastfeeding into their programme for government, with investment which led to an increase in breastfeeding rates. It is progress, but so much more needs to be done. As I hope I have outlined, this matter goes far beyond individual choice. Ultimately, a healthier population is a positive externality: it benefits everyone, saving money for the NHS through infant and maternal health, a healthier workforce and better outcomes in education. Encouraging breastfeeding and regulating formula effectively should be seen not as a drain on the public purse but as an investment for the future.

I have some asks for the Minister. Almost exactly six years ago, I published my Feeding Products for Babies and Children (Advertising and Promotion) Bill, and I would be glad to speak to the Minister further about it, because it presented the Government with credible options that could make a difference. As I mentioned earlier, we are also at an important juncture with the retained EU law Bill, which could see current infant formula regulations being scrapped. Let us not forget that these important regulations across Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland protect the health of our youngest citizens. They must be retained, but they must also be strengthened.

Prior to Brexit, when I asked about the prospect of the UK Government joining the countries that have fully implemented the World Health Organisation's international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, I was told that our membership of the EU presented a barrier to doing that. That excuse has now vanished, so I would like the Minister to tell me tonight when he aims to implement the code in full.

Will the Minister meet the authors of *The Lancet* reports and representatives of the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities to discuss further what the Government intend to do in response to these findings? Will he accept that child and maternal health should come before the profits of commercial milk formula producers? Will he commit today to exploring the role of the UK Government in stopping the aggressive marketing of the formula milk industry? As *The Lancet* so clearly set out, superficial slogans to encourage breastfeeding are a poor substitute for addressing the sociocultural, economic and commercial determinants of infant and young child feeding. I urge the UK Government to engage with the reports and to do much better by our youngest citizens.

8.22 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) on securing this timely debate. I know that she has a keen interest in this important matter and shows great leadership in ensuring that infant feeding remains a priority Government policy, perhaps most notably as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities. I welcome the publication of the 2023 *Lancet* series and the information it provides to add to the debate on promoting breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is a crucial aspect of infant health and nutrition, and this Government are committed to promoting and supporting breastfeeding policy to ensure that all infants have the best start in life. The Government understand the many health benefits that come with breastfeeding for both the mother and the child, and it is our priority to encourage, support and empower women to breastfeed. We recognise that for some women, breastfeeding may not always be a viable option—for some, it may simply not be what they want to do—but the Government continue to create a supportive environment that informs and supports families when starting the infant feeding journey, ensuring that they are able to make informed decisions about how best to feed their babies. This includes providing breastfeeding advice and guidance through a range of approaches, including paid-for social media activity, personalised email programmes and the NHS Start for Life website.

In line with these commitments, we have taken a number of steps to improve support for infant feeding. From 2022-23 we are investing around £300 million in family hubs and Start for Life services, targeting the three years of funding at 75 local authorities in England that have high levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes. These 75 participating local authorities have already received at least half their year 1 allocation. As part of this, 14 local authorities have been identified to become trailblazers to lead the way and support other local authorities to improve the services offered to families. This funding package includes



[Neil O'Brien]

£50 million to invest in infant feeding services, which will enable participating local authorities to design and deliver a blended offer of advice and support for families in line with local needs to help all families to meet their breastfeeding goals. Services will enable parents to access face-to-face, virtual, and digital infant feeding support when and where they need it.

The Government also recognise the importance of creating a breastfeeding-friendly work environment, and we recommend that employers take steps to enable women to breastfeed as a matter of best practice. For example, the Health and Safety Executive has published comprehensive guidance on how employers can meet their legal requirements to support new mothers, and it advises employers that it is good practice to provide a private, healthy and safe environment for breastfeeding mothers to express and store their milk. The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service has also published guidance to support employers in accommodating employees who return to work while breastfeeding or expressing milk.

As is recognised in *The Lancet* series, it is critical that Governments gather reliable data on rates of breastfeeding to ensure that policies are having their desired effect and to better target our interventions. Therefore, work is currently under way on the delivery of a new infant feeding survey, commissioned for England by the Department of Health and Social Care's Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. The new survey, which last ran in 2010, will provide valuable information on infant feeding behaviours and other related factors. Data collection is expected to commence this year and we anticipate that the results of the survey will be available in 2024.

These investments and strategies all build on existing measures that this Government continue to uphold. This includes legislation that governs the marketing, composition and labelling of infant formula and follow-on formula. The legislation reflects the latest scientific advice on the essential composition of infant formula and follow-on formula. This legislation upholds the Government's commitment to the general principles and ambitions of the World Health Organisation's international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes by prohibiting the promotion, marketing and advertising of infant formula to ensure that breastfeeding is not discouraged. The legislation mandates that the labelling of infant formula and follow-on formula includes information stating the advantages of breastfeeding, includes the necessary information on the appropriate use of the products and does not include pictures or text that idealise the use of the product.

I understand that there have been calls to strengthen this legislation or even go further than is specified in the WHO code, as is suggested in *The Lancet* series that prompted this debate. The Government of course welcome challenges to our existing ways of doing things and we

are committed to ensuring that our legislation continues to be based on comprehensive evidence and sound analysis.

**Alison Thewliss:** The UK Government's current legislation falls far short of the code's recommendations, and it is not enforced in any meaningful way. Many tins found in shops do not comply with the legislation as it exists, never mind the code's stronger recommendations. These tins of formula have idealised images, such as cartoon bears and animals, on their labels, which would not happen if the Government enforced even their current legislation.

**Neil O'Brien:** I will come to the hon. Lady's point about legislation in a moment, but I will first complete my thought.

We must not forget that there are non-legislative routes by which we can achieve many of the same goals. For example, as part of the NHS's ongoing vision to improve post-natal care, the long-term plan includes a commitment that all maternity services that do not deliver an accredited, evidence-based infant feeding programme, such as the UNICEF UK baby-friendly initiative, will begin the accreditation process with a view to all services achieving full accreditation by March 2024. Local maternity systems in England are responsible for ensuring that all maternity services are on track to achieve this commitment, which will help to improve standards and reduce variation in the care that women and families receive. Targeted support is now available for local services to fulfil the commitment.

I recognise there is always room for improvement, and we continually work to enhance our efforts and to ensure our legislation and policies reflect the latest scientific advice and evidence. The UK has strict legislation in place that gives effect to the aims and principles of the WHO international code of marketing of breast-milk substitutes, which is governed in Great Britain through retained EU legislation. There are currently no differences in GB legislation on the areas covered by the code. The protocol on Ireland/ Northern Ireland provides that EU legislation relating to nutrition continues to be directly applicable in Northern Ireland, and this includes Commission delegated regulation 2016/127 on infant formula and follow-on formula, so we have precisely the same rules in place as the European Union. I know that, in general, the SNP is always keen on that.

The Government have demonstrated, through our continued significant policy development and ongoing investment, a steadfast commitment to promoting and supporting breastfeeding, where appropriate, to ensure that all children have the best start in life. We remain committed to protecting our children, and we will continue to take the necessary steps to ensure that all mothers and families have the information and support they need to make informed decisions about how to feed their babies.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.30 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Monday 20 February 2023

## TREASURY

### Public Service Pension Scheme Indexation and Revaluation 2023

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):** Public service pensions continue to be among the very best available.

Legislation governing public service pensions in payment requires them to be increased annually by the same percentage as additional pensions, state earnings related pension and state second pension. Public service pensions will therefore be increased from 10 April 2023 by 10.1%, in line with the annual increase in the consumer prices index up to September 2022, except for those public service pensions which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro-rata increase.

Separately, in the career average revalued earnings public service pension schemes introduced in 2014 and 2015, pensions in accrual are revalued annually in relation to either prices or earnings depending on the terms specified in their scheme regulations. The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 requires HMT to specify a measure of prices and of earnings to be used for revaluation by these schemes.

The prices measure is the consumer prices index up to September 2022. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of prices, therefore, will use the figure of 10.1% for the prices element of revaluation.

The earnings measure is the whole economy year on year change in average weekly earnings, non-seasonally adjusted and including bonuses and arrears, up to September 2022. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of earnings, therefore, will use the figure of 7% for the earnings element of revaluation.

As announced by the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as part of the Government plan for patients on 22 September 2022, the effective date of revaluation will be 6 April 2023 for the NHS Pension Scheme England & Wales, subject to a consultation by the Department for Health and Social Care. The NHS Pension Scheme (Scotland), the Local Government Pension Scheme England & Wales and the Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) will also use 6 April 2023 as the effective date, subject to consultation and other processes by the Scottish Government and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. For all other schemes in scope of this order, the effective date of revaluation remains 1 April 2023.

Revaluation is one part of the amount of pension that members earn in a year and needs to be considered in conjunction with the amount of in-year accrual. Typically, schemes with lower revaluation will have faster accrual and therefore members will earn more pension per year. The following list shows how the main public service schemes will be affected by revaluation:

Scheme	Police	Firefighters	Civil Service	NHS	Teachers	LGPS	Armed Forces	Judicial
Revaluation for active members	11.35%	7%	10.1%	11.6%	11.7%	10.1%	7%	10.1%

[HCWS566]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### 2023 Strategic Policing Requirement

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** The strategic policing requirement (SPR), as set out in section 37A of the Police Act 1996, sets out my view as Home Secretary, as to what the national threats are and the national policing capabilities required to counter those threats. The SPR supports police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and chief constables in balancing local and national priorities effectively, and in driving improvements to their force's response to serious and cross-boundary threats.

Following an extensive review and consultation, I am today issuing an updated SPR which builds upon the previous SPR and confirms the existing threats of terrorism, civil emergencies, public disorder, cyber-security incidents, child sexual abuse and serious and organised crime. For the first time, it also includes violence against woman and girls (VAWG) as an additional national threat and recognises the risk it currently presents to public safety and confidence. This will ensure that PCCs and chief constables focus resources and capabilities to tackle this issue of national importance.

The addition of VAWG as a national threat is recognition of the risk it currently presents to public safety and confidence. The updated SPR sets clear expectations around the local and regional police capabilities response to tackle VAWG and how their local force works with others, including collaborating with other agencies. This addition also responds to the recommendation made by the His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, fire and rescue services (HMICFRS) review into the policing response to VAWG.

The Prime Minister and I have made tackling violence against women and girls a key priority and as such no woman or girl should ever have to feel unsafe in her home or community. For example, the Home Office continues to fund DCC Maggie Blyth's role as the national policing lead for VAWG, alongside funding to support the continued excellent work of the NPCC VAWG taskforce in driving co-ordination and improving the national policing response to VAWG.

The other changes in the revised SPR include:

A more detailed description of how national threats should be tackled by police forces. The response to the national threats is now set out according to the six headings: outcomes; capabilities; capacity requirements; consistency and standards; collaboration; and connectivity with partners.

Strengthened governance and assurance arrangements, including a requirement for more distinct references to the SPR in police and crime plans.

An enhanced summary of each threat, including the numerous related crime types. For example, the serious and organised crime threat now covers in detail crime types such as fraud and organised immigration crime. The public disorder threat summarises the risk of disruptive protests and the capability response required.

My officials have consulted extensively with police leaders and other relevant partners while reviewing the SPR.

The Policing Protocol Order 2011 requires PCCs and forces to have regard to the SPR when exercising their functions. I have committed to reviewing the SPR within two years of publication to ensure it reflects any key changes or shifting threats and priorities in the policing landscape.

A copy of the SPR will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and can also be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement>

[HCWS565]

### **Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** Violence against women and girls (VAWG) are despicable crimes that must be tackled with a whole-of-society approach. These crimes are deeply harmful, not only because of the devastating impact they can have on victims, survivors, and their loved ones, but because of the harm they inflict on wider society. Domestic abuse alone affects 2.4 million adults every year. One in five cases of murder and manslaughter is domestic abuse-related, and a Home Office funded project found that there were 64 victim suicides following domestic abuse in the year to March 2022, although this is likely to be an underestimate. Families should never have to grieve loved ones who have lost their lives through domestic abuse-related murder, manslaughter and suicide.

This Government have made tackling violence against women and girls a key priority. The 2022 cross-Government tackling domestic abuse plan committed to investing over £230 million over three years. The plan complements the tackling violence against women and girls strategy, published in 2021, which committed to supporting victims and survivors with more than £300 million being invested in that year. The strategy aimed to ensure that women and girls are safe everywhere—at home, online, at work and on the streets. Together these commitments aim to transform the whole of society's response to these crimes with actions to prevent abuse, support victims and pursue perpetrators, as well as to strengthen systems to respond to violence against women and girls.

But the fact remains that these crimes are still far too prevalent, and we need to go further.

Today, we have announced a package of measures that will bolster the work to hold perpetrators to account and better support victims. It is completely unacceptable that women and girls are still subject to these crimes and I am committed to tackling offenders and providing victims with the support and justice they deserve. I believe this type of crime can be prevented and I am taking action to reduce the terrible harm it causes.

### **Adding the most dangerous domestic abuse offenders to the violent and sex offender register**

I want to ensure we are managing and targeting the most dangerous offenders. This is why we will legislate so those with convictions of controlling or coercive behaviour (CCB) with a sentence of 12 months or more imprisonment or a suspended sentence will be subject to more intensive management by police, probation and prison service through changes to the multi-agency public protection arrangements. This will also place a duty to co-operate on other relevant agencies to ensure the risks associated with that offender are properly targeted and managed. Currently, CCB offenders are managed in this specific way on a discretionary basis. This policy seeks to remove that discretion and make it automatic where the offender meets the sentencing threshold, putting CCB on par with serious physical violence. This is crucial as we know that this is a key risk factor in domestic abuse-related cases of murder and manslaughter. We will seek to legislate for this change at the earliest possible opportunity.

We will also add these offenders to the violent and sex offender register so there is a record of the most dangerous domestic abuse offenders and information about them is appropriately shared. However, we cannot wait for legislation to start recording these dangerous offenders on the violent and sex offender register. We will start work immediately to ensure they are placed on this database so that information about them can be appropriately shared and they don't fall through the cracks.

### **Adding violence against women and girls to the strategic policing requirement**

Today, for the first time, violence against women and girls has been elevated to a crime type that policing leaders must treat as a national threat, as part of the revised strategic policing requirement (SPR). Inclusion in this key operational document places VAWG on the same footing as serious organised crime and child sexual abuse and sets my clear expectations of police and crime commissioners and chief constables to focus their resources and capabilities to tackle this issue as one of the utmost national importance. The updated SPR sets clear expectations around the local and regional police capabilities response to tackle VAWG, and how their local force works with others, including collaborating with other agencies. The addition of VAWG as a national threat is recognition of the risk it currently presents to public safety and confidence.

### **Piloting the expansion of the "Ask for ANI" codeword scheme**

In January 2021, the Home Office launched the "Ask for ANI" (Action Needed Immediately) codeword scheme to provide victims of domestic abuse with a simple and discreet way to signal that they need immediate help from the safety of their local pharmacy. The "Ask for ANI" scheme was developed with the help of partners, including the domestic abuse sector, pharmacy associations and the police, and is designed to work alongside and build on the existing work carried out by local areas; it provides an additional tool that can be used to help the most vulnerable victims access emergency support in the community.

Since its launch, the "Ask for ANI" scheme has been a success; over 5,000 UK pharmacies, including both independent pharmacies and chains like Boots and



Superdrug, are now enrolled in the scheme. In the tackling domestic abuse plan, we highlighted the importance of making it easier for victims to ask for help. That is why we committed to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to trial, and if successful, consider a national roll-out of the “Ask for ANI” codeword scheme in jobcentres.

Today we have launched the “Ask for ANI” scheme in 18 pilot sites; 14 jobcentres in England, Wales and Scotland and 4 jobs and benefits offices in Northern Ireland. We aim to undertake an independent evaluation to understand the impact of the scheme across the jobcentre network, and if proven to be successful we will consider a national roll-out. We have also launched an online postcode checker where everyone can check their nearest “Ask for ANI” provider, including both participating pharmacies and jobcentres.

#### **Piloting new domestic abuse protection notices and orders**

In the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Government legislated for a new civil domestic abuse protection notice (DAPN) to provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident, and a new civil domestic abuse protection order (DAPO) to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims. DAPOs will be available in all court jurisdictions, and breach of any requirement will be a criminal offence. The court will be able to impose positive requirements such as attendance on perpetrator behaviour change programmes, alongside electronic monitoring and mandatory notification requirements of changes to the perpetrator’s name and address to the police.

Today, we can announce that the new notices and orders will be piloted from June 2024 for two years in Gwent, Manchester, and three London boroughs, with the Metropolitan Police and the British Transport Police, and other partners. The pilot will be independently evaluated, which will inform whether the notice and orders are rolled out nationally.

#### **Creating a new digital domestic abuse harm risk assessment tool**

We will develop a digital tool so that police forces can quickly identify their highest-risk domestic abuse perpetrators and take the appropriate action. This includes domestic abuse perpetrators without a conviction, which is crucial as in the year ending March 2022 there were 910,980 domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, compared with just 40,647 convictions. We will appoint the tool’s developer this spring and identify police forces to trial and pilot it next year.

In the meantime, we are clear that we expect police forces to be proactively identifying and managing the most dangerous perpetrators in their area.

#### **Domestic violence disclosure scheme**

Today, we have published updated guidance for the domestic violence disclosure scheme, also known as “Clare’s Law”, ahead of next month’s commencement of section 77 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which places the guidance into statute.

Putting the guidance on a statutory footing will mean the police can apply the scheme consistently across the country. The domestic violence disclosure scheme allows the police to disclose information about an individual’s previous violent or abusive offending in order to protect a victim or potential victim. Under the new guidance,

the police will be required to disclose information on perpetrators quicker. Police will have 28 days to disclose the information, down from the current guidelines of 35. This will mean victims and potential victims should have the information that could be critical to their safety faster.

#### **Funding interventions for domestic abuse perpetrators**

We continue to invest heavily in funding interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse. We are clear that the onus must be taken off victims and placed on the abusers to change their behaviour. The Home Office has committed up to £36 million over two years to fund more domestic abuse perpetrator interventions. The funding will be for police and crime commissioners to work with partners to deliver interventions tailored to the needs in their local areas, and the next iteration of funding will commence in April 2023.

This is in addition to the £40.9 million of funding we have given to local areas since 2020 for perpetrator interventions and the £2.36 million invested in research into improving our understanding of perpetrators so we can better prevent harm and understand “what works”. This will bring the total funding committed to tackling domestic abuse perpetrators to over £79 million since 2020.

#### **Funding support services for victims**

We must first and foremost seek to prevent domestic abuse from happening. But when it does occur, we need to do everything in our power to support victims and survivors. This is why the Home Office has allocated up to £8.4 million over two years for victims’ services. This is targeted to fund between 17 and 33 projects or programmes, which will mobilise on 1 April 2023. This will fund specialist organisations, many of which work within the communities they serve and are a vital component in providing the trauma-informed, tailored support the tackling violence against women and girls strategy committed to. Funding will also allow organisations to develop the “whole-system” capability of providing support to victims of sexual violence and the employers’ response to victims of domestic abuse. This is part of the wider Government commitment in the tackling domestic abuse plan to invest £140 million to support victims.

Together, these measures will help us to build a society that has zero tolerance to violence against women and girls and lets us take the necessary steps to protect the safety and freedom of women and girls across the country.

[HCWS564]

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Bus Funding**

#### **The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Mark Harper):**

The Government recognise the importance of local bus networks to ensuring communities can stay connected, and in enabling people to access work, education and vital local services such as healthcare. We also know that the bus sector faces challenges following the covid-19 pandemic, including lower levels of bus patronage compared with pre-pandemic levels.

The Government to date have taken action to help address some of the challenges faced by the sector and passengers following on from the pandemic, to protect vital local bus services by providing £2 billion in additional funding, including investing £60 million to help operators cap single tickets at £2 in England outside London from 1 January to 31 March. We have also announced our intention to invest up to £75 million to extend the £2 bus fare cap for a further 3 months until 30 June 2023.

Over 140 operators covering more than 4,600 routes are currently signed up to participate in the scheme, which is designed to help passengers to save on their regular travel costs and boost patronage on buses. The scheme is showing early signs of increased bus use, with an independent survey of 1,000 people from passenger watchdog Transport Focus showing 7% of people saying they are using the bus more. Participation in the scheme from operators is voluntary, and as such the Department for Transport will now work with the operators to reconfirm their participation for this extended period.

It has also become clear that without further support for the bus sector once the bus recovery grant ends—a temporary grant provided to help adjust services to new travel patterns following on from the covid-19 pandemic—there would be a risk of reductions to bus services throughout England, outside of London. The Government have therefore announced on 17 February that we will be extending the bus recovery grant for a further three months at a cost of up to £80 million to continue supporting bus services until 30 June 2023.

The £155 million additional funding to extend the bus recovery grant and the £2 bus fare cap we have announced demonstrates this Government continued commitment to supporting local bus services, and working closely with bus operators and local transport authorities to deliver on the ambition set out in the national bus strategy for everyone, everywhere to have access to affordable and reliable bus services.

[HCWS567]

### Rail Strikes: Minimum Service Levels

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Huw Merriman):** Our railways play an important role in connecting communities and keeping the economy moving. Whether it is travelling to a medical appointment, school, work or to visit a relative, for many, our railways are a lifeline.

Over the last year, passengers, through no fault of their own, have been subject to severe disruption on the railways due to sustained industrial action. This has had a nationwide impact. It has stopped key workers getting to work, children going to school, and restricted people's access to essential services such as hospital care.

The Government recognise the importance of workers' ability to take strike action, and this will be protected. Recent industrial action, though, has demonstrated how strikes disproportionately impact people from accessing the services they require.

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will set a legislative framework to balance workers' ability to strike with the public's ability to get to work and access vital services.

Today, I am pleased to confirm that a consultation on setting minimum service levels for passenger rail has opened and will run for 12 weeks from 20 February to 15 May. The Department is seeking views from the public, from the rail sector, trade unions and wider industries to develop a more detailed understanding of the impact of strike activity and how minimum service levels might be applied for passenger rail to reduce the disruptions caused by strikes. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill receiving Royal Assent, minimum service levels for passenger rail would then be delivered through regulations.

[HCWS568]

# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 20 February 2023*

## CABINET OFFICE

### Topical Questions

*The following is an extract from Cabinet Office questions on 2 February 2023:*

**Sir Chris Bryant:** There is, literally, one rule for all normal MPs and another for Ministers in relation to transparency. All ordinary MPs must declare all their financial interests within 28 days, whereas, as has already been revealed, Ministers do it considerably later, if at all. Why do we have to wait until May to know what Ministers' financial interests are? Only a few weeks ago, when we had a vote on this matter, the Leader of the House promised that she would ensure that all Ministers were held to the same timetable as other MPs. When is that going to happen?

**Oliver Dowden:** Ministers are required, under the ministerial code, to provide full declarations, so I dispute the hon. Gentleman's claim in that regard. However, he

raises an important point which I have discussed with the Leader of the House. We are taking steps to move to more rapid declarations of ministerial interests so that they align more closely with the declarations of Members of Parliament, and we are working through those processes with our private offices.

*[Official Report, 2 February 2023, Vol. 727, c. 453.]*

*Letter of correction from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden).*

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Sir Chris Bryant).

The correct information should have been:

**Oliver Dowden:** Ministers are required, under the ministerial code, to provide full declarations, so I dispute the hon. Gentleman's claim in that regard. However, he raises an important point which I have discussed with the Leader of the House. We are taking steps to move to more rapid **sharing of Ministers' transparency publications** so that they align more closely with the declarations of Members of Parliament, and we are working through those processes with our private offices.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 20 February 2023

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than  
Monday 27 February 2023**

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PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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