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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Financial Guidance and Claims Bill [HL]	
<i>First Reading</i>	27
Business of the House	
<i>Motion on Standing Orders</i>	27
Committee of Selection	
<i>Membership Motion</i>	27
Queen's Speech	
<i>Debate (2nd day)</i>	28
Terrorist Attacks	
<i>Statement</i>	60
Grenfell Tower	
<i>Statement</i>	69
Queen's Speech	
<i>Debate (2nd day) (Continued)</i>	84

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

No party affiliation is given for Members serving the House in a formal capacity, the Lords spiritual, Members on leave of absence or Members who are otherwise disqualified from sitting in the House.

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House of Lords

Thursday 22 June 2017

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Bristol.

Oaths and Affirmations

11.05 am

Several noble Lords took the oath or made the solemn affirmation, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Financial Guidance and Claims Bill [HL]

First Reading

11.12 am

A Bill to make provision establishing a new financial guidance body; to make provision about the funding of debt advice in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and to make provision about the regulation of claims management services.

The Bill was introduced by Baroness Buscombe, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Business of the House

Motion on Standing Orders

11.12 am

Moved by Lord Taylor of Holbeach

That Standing Order 40(9) (Arrangement of the Order Paper) be dispensed with on Monday 3 July to allow a balloted topical Question for Short Debate to be taken after the first motion for general debate that day.

Committee of Selection

Membership Motion

11.13 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That in accordance with Standing Order 63 a Committee of Selection be appointed to select and propose to the House the names of the members to form each select committee of the House (except the Committee of Selection itself and any committee otherwise provided for by statute or by order of the House) or any other body not being a select committee referred to it by the Senior Deputy Speaker, and the panel of Deputy Chairmen of Committees; and that the following members together with the Senior Deputy Speaker be appointed to the Committee:

Lord Bassam of Brighton, Lord Craig of Radley, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Lord Hope of Craighead, Lord Newby, Lord Plant of Highfield, Baroness Smith of Basildon, Lord Stoneham of Droxford, Lord Taylor of Holbeach, Viscount Ullswater.

Motion agreed.

Queen's Speech

Debate (2nd Day)

11.13 am

Moved on Wednesday 21 June by Lord Forsyth of Drumlean

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows:

“Most Gracious Sovereign—We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, beg leave to thank Your Majesty for the most gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament”.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Earl Howe) (Con): My Lords, it is a great honour to open this debate on Her Majesty’s gracious Speech, knowing as I do that when it comes to the subjects of defence, foreign affairs, international development and trade, we have experts on each topic present in this Chamber, so I very much look forward to a constructive and lively discussion.

Providing a succinct summation of the Government’s priorities in these areas is eminently straightforward: we are here to protect our people, preserve the international order and promote the UK’s global prosperity. However, delivering on these ambitions is a far more complex task, since we are faced with a geopolitical situation that is getting progressively darker and more dangerous.

In the past few months we have witnessed close up a succession of terror attacks. Earlier this week, worshippers at the Finsbury mosque were shockingly mown down by a van driver. Several weeks before that, innocents at London Bridge were cruelly knifed. Before that, teenagers were massacred in Manchester and tourists savagely struck on Westminster Bridge. Yet the spread of terror, as perpetrated by the likes of Daesh and its ilk, is far from our only problem. We are also contending with a raft of state aggressors: Russia menacing Ukraine and her eastern European neighbours, North Korea persistently flaunting its nuclear capability, and a rising China in the South China Sea. On top of that, we are coming to terms with the threats of cyber warfare, most vividly demonstrated recently by the global disruption caused by the WannaCry virus. Taken together, such dangers, in their multiplicity, diversity and concurrence, imperil not just our own security but the entire rules-based system underpinning our values.

That is why our 2015 strategic defence and security review recognised the need for stronger defence. We responded in three ways, the first by investing in world-class kit. We chose to grow our defence budget year on year. It was £35 billion in 2016, £36 billion in 2017, and it will be £37 billion in 2018. Consequently, we are not just meeting NATO’s 2% target but spending £178 billion on new equipment: from Ajax armoured vehicles to Apache attack helicopters; from our two mighty aircraft carriers to our Dreadnought submarines; and from fifth-generation F35s to state-of-the art unmanned aerial vehicles.

[EARL HOWE]

Secondly, we are investing in a world-class workforce. Our brave service men and women are our greatest assets. Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, they are working on our behalf. However, in a more competitive marketplace, we must do more to recruit and retain the right mix of individuals and skills. We are therefore modernising our employment offer, introducing a Bill to make it easier for our regulars to work flexibly. In future, our personnel will be able to change temporarily the nature of their service, working part-time or being protected from deployment to support an individual's personnel circumstances where the business need allows.

We are going further. Today, not every soldier wishes to live on the barracks; nor should we expect them to. We are therefore opening up more opportunity for our people to own their own homes and live in private accommodation, nearer to their families or to their partners' places of work. Finally, at a time of acute skills shortages in critical trades such as engineering, we will make it easier for people to switch between the public and private sector so we can hang on to those essential talents.

We are conscious too of the need to strengthen our Armed Forces covenant, going out of our way to ensure that those who lay their lives on the line suffer no disadvantage. For too long, those who suffered the consequences of conflict, whether through injury or bereavement, had to waste time pursuing legal claims through the courts like some modern version of Dickens's Circumlocution Office. We have consulted on proposals to introduce a new scheme for better compensation, and I hope to bring forward our response and plans for taking those forward shortly.

There is also more to do to ensure that our veterans can make a smooth transition to civilian life. Veterans often run the gauntlet of myriad organisations before getting the precise help that they need. Therefore, besides working with charities to establish a veterans' gateway—a first point of contact and a signposting system for veterans seeking support—we will introduce a veterans' board, based in the Cabinet Office, to improve the co-ordination of these services.

So there will be better kit and more personnel support. The third element of stronger defence is stronger international partnerships. Solving complex global problems demands international co-operation, so even as the UK steps back from Europe you will see us stepping up around the world. Today, we are strengthening our commitment to NATO, the bedrock of our defence. As we speak, UK forces are leading the Enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia, working alongside their US counterparts in Poland and heading up the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Land) to ward off Russian aggression. The legendary 3 (Fighter) Squadron, which earned its wings in two world wars, is currently in Romania protecting Black Sea skies, and our ships are rescuing migrants and protecting sea lanes.

NATO aside, the UK is accelerating its efforts as part of the counter-Daesh coalition. The number of UK strikes remains second only to the United States and our troops have trained tens of thousands of local forces to push back the Daesh death cult. Lastly,

we are doubling our United Nations peacekeeping efforts. We are sending soldiers to South Sudan to help alleviate the humanitarian situation and training Somali forces to push back the al-Shabaab extremists. We are also modernising the institution itself so that it has the resources, leadership and training vital for facing the future.

Turning to development, our work with the United Nations is a reminder that defence and development are two sides of the same coin. Early engagement with countries in crisis can prevent regional catastrophe down the line. That is why we became the first country to meet the International Development Act by spending 0.7% of our gross national income on international development. In fact, we are the only major country in the world meeting both the NATO and IDA targets. That money is being put to good use. It is giving more than 60 million people in fragile countries access to clean water, better sanitation and hygiene; it is transforming the lives of millions of children, who, having been immunised and protected from disease, are also receiving an education; and it is continually being drawn on to assist in disaster relief—for example, creating education, skills and job opportunities for Syrian refugees in their host communities. Recently, DfID announced a new £60 million package for Somalia and £30 million for Ethiopia to prevent a repeat of the ferocious famines that have blighted those nations in the past.

Acting alone we can achieve much; acting together with international partners can achieve much more. That is why we have pressed the World Bank to improve the way it delivers development assistance—doubling investment for fragile states, increasing support for poorer nations dealing with prolonged crises, and strengthening its focus on job and wealth creation. For the first time, the International Development Association will leverage borrowing from the market. Every £1 of UK investment will now deliver £3 of development assistance.

The activity that goes hand in hand with defence and development is diplomacy. Our approach to combating extremism is a case in point. Just as we continue striking Daesh night and day in Iraq and Syria, so our diplomats are working with our counter-Daesh coalition partners to achieve the political settlement that guarantees a better future for all. Meanwhile, the FCO is also building the international networks that are so vital if we are to dissipate the insidious ideology of extremism, depriving the fanatics of their safe spaces in the physical and virtual worlds. However, as a beacon for democratic values and freedoms across the world, our Government are going further, using our soft power, as a leading G7, NATO and Security Council member, to uphold human rights, prevent sexual violence, address the causes of mass migration and spread opportunity.

That outward-looking approach will not change after Brexit. Our aim is to develop a deep and special partnership with the EU and strengthen our international ties. As noble Lords are aware, Brexit negotiations have begun. Our priority for this phase is to guarantee the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in EU member states, including those of Irish and Northern Irish nationals.

The second phase, expected to run until late 2018, will cover the future UK-EU relationship and implementation of a future agreement. The third phase, until 29 March 2019, will cover ratification of the withdrawal treaty and preparation for UK exit. The final agreement requires a majority vote by the Council of the European Union, consent by the European Parliament and agreement from our own Parliament. We will now introduce a Bill to ensure the UK exits the UK with certainty, continuity and confidence.

Noble Lords: Oh!

Earl Howe: I beg noble Lords' pardon: the UK exits the EU with certainty, continuity and confidence. I am pleased that noble Lords are listening.

Our approach to commerce will be key to unlocking the opportunity that Brexit brings. When it comes to trade, our challenge is to forge an independent framework enacting our priorities and ambitions, so the Government will introduce a trade Bill, preserving, as far as possible, existing trade access and arrangements for UK businesses on exit, while developing an independent trade policy outside the EU.

To deliver our goals, the Department for International Trade is expanding. Since the department's formation, its head count has increased by more than 20% to create a global workforce of more than 3,100 people. Its trade policy team has quadrupled in size and it has hired New Zealand's former trade head, Crawford Falconer, as chief trade negotiation adviser to manage the UK's free trade deals once the country leaves the EU. All the while our Ministers have been travelling the globe, banging the drum for British business and cementing bilateral ties. A series of nine working groups with 15 countries and high-level dialogues have been established to explore the best ways of progressing our trade.

The challenges our nation faces today are unprecedented. We do not underestimate what lies ahead, yet we also have no doubt that the bold reforms set out in this gracious Speech for defence, development, foreign affairs and trade will lead to a stronger global Britain, facing up to its responsibilities, reaching out to old friends and new, and opening up the opportunity to secure a better future for our people. I beg to move.

11.27 am

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I begin by expressing my condolences to the families of all those who tragically lost their lives in the terror attacks in Manchester and London. We owe a great debt to the police and our security services, who work tirelessly to keep all our communities safe. I also pay tribute to the men and women of our Armed Forces who patrolled our streets in the immediate aftermath of the awful tragedy in Manchester. At the end of the debate, my noble friend Lord Touhig will wind up for these Benches and focus on defence and our Armed Forces. I therefore leave these for him to address.

"The truth is that UK development influence is massive, greater than our foreign policy, and this isn't just about money, Britain is saving lives and bringing stability and security, and that's good for our economy".

These are not my words; they are the words of Priti Patel in her interview with the *Guardian* earlier this week. I repeat them as today's debate on Her Majesty's gracious Speech is all about Britain's part in creating a just, safe, secure and sustainable planet that is free from the fear of hunger and poverty.

I welcome the consensus on spending 0.7% on development. However, I have concerns that the Conservative manifesto, challenging the internationally agreed definition of what constitutes ODA, represents a shift away from this. If this is pursued, will the Minister undertake the widest consultation process with NGOs and development charities before the Government commence international talks to change the rules?

After President Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Paris agreement, I welcome the commitment in Her Majesty's gracious Speech for Britain to be in the lead in creating a sustainable planet. Will the Minister give us more details on how we strengthen work with our allies, particularly in the EU, on delivering the climate change agreement?

Poverty and bad governance are still holding back too many countries and their people. Many women, disabled and older people, and too many minorities, are discriminated against and denied access to their fair share of goods, services and opportunity. Economic growth has the potential to be the engine to drive change but growth without jobs, inclusion, healthcare, education, human rights—growth without power—will not deliver for the many. The universal nature of the sustainable development goals and the principle of "leave no one behind" are vital tools.

Decent jobs are a key part of goal 8 in the SDGs, yet DfID's review at the end of last year made no mention of trade unions. As an Opposition holding the Government to account we will put human rights at the heart of our work—civil and political rights. By supporting trade unions, women's associations and other civil society groups, we give them a voice in mounting their own advocacy challenges to their Governments in defence of human rights.

We will push the Government to tighten the rules governing corporate responsibility and accountability for abuses in the global supply chain. We will push for a fairer tax system for the world's poorest countries, demanding decisive action on tax havens, including Crown dependencies and overseas territories, ensuring a public register of owners.

On global trade agreements, there are opportunities but principles must govern them. The most important is a pro-poor and pro-development policy. Labour will demand the maintenance of high social and environmental standards in trade agreements post-Brexit to guarantee continuing access to the EU market. The Government have a poor record when it comes to respecting parliamentary sovereignty and have failed to meet Labour's commitment to an international trade White Paper. We demand provisions for proper parliamentary scrutiny of all proposed trade deals and treaty obligations in the future.

A multilateral approach to global engagement, working with our allies, as the noble Earl said, is essential to counter and confront terrorism. The challenges are

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

great and include securing peace and stability in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine, defeating ISIL and addressing Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programmes. Further missile tests and the death of Otto Warmbier, the US student, have heightened tensions on the Korean peninsula. The Government have made it clear that they see military action as undesirable, working with the US in the UN to ensure that there are stronger sanctions. What is the Government's assessment of the current sanctions regime and what dialogue has there been between the Prime Minister and President Trump on developments in Korea?

In the Middle East we need to continue to press for a two-state solution. However, we have also seen increased tensions in the Gulf region. What steps have the Government undertaken with the Gulf countries to de-escalate the situation? What action have they taken to encourage Qatar to engage with its neighbours on their concerns about extremism? Leaders cannot act with impunity. The use of chemical weapons in Syria is a crime and those responsible must be held to account. I hope that the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, whom I welcome to his new responsibilities, will update the House on the actions that this Government have taken since April when we discussed this matter.

The Government's commitment to passing new legislation setting a framework for the UK to implement sanctions after we leave the EU is both necessary and welcome. When does the Minister expect draft legislation to be published? Can he confirm that the Bill will set out specific criteria for imposing sanctions? Can he assure the House that a clear process will be established to provide that sanctions are properly targeted, ensuring that those responsible for the grossest violations of human rights and international law face consequences for their actions? Human rights are universal. Mature democracies should support the development of free societies everywhere, while upholding their own legal and moral obligations.

Gender-based violence remains all too evident globally. With the departure of the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, from the FCO, who will take on her role as the Prime Minister's special representative on preventing sexual violence in conflict?

We are now seeing a world where LGBT+ people face not only discrimination and anti-gay laws but increased violence. The killing, torture and arbitrary detention of people in Chechnya due to their actual or perceived LGBT status is the most horrendous example. Can the Minister reassure the House that the Government will make regular inquiries regarding progress in the investigation of the anti-gay purge in Chechnya, and will the Government publicly demonstrate support for journalists and human rights defenders working to expose and counter abuses by Chechen authorities? Is it not time for the Government to appoint a Minister with cross-departmental responsibilities for the human rights of LGBT+ persons?

Her Majesty's gracious Speech mentioned preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April next year. The summit provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to demonstrate its commitment to democracy, transparency, the rule of law and human

rights as laid down in its charter. Will the Minister guarantee that the Government will put as a major theme the promotion not only of women's rights but of those within the LGBT community? In outlining plans fully to engage parliamentarians and civil society, I hope that the Minister will also include worker representatives and the international trade union movement so that we strengthen advocacy for delivering on improved labour standards throughout the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister recently underlined the UK's steadfast support for the process of negotiation in Cyprus. In April, after eight weeks of suspended negotiations, both sides agreed to resume the talks. On 5 June, after a dinner hosted by the UN Secretary-General, both leaders announced a new Geneva conference which is now scheduled for 28 June. What is the Government's assessment of those talks and of any potential breakthrough?

This generation has the opportunity to eliminate aid dependency for good by empowering the powerless. That is Labour's vision and we will press the Government to do it as well.

11.38 am

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in expressing condolences to those who tragically lost their lives and, as the son of an emergency worker—my dad was an ambulance driver all his life—I pay tribute to our emergency services, which have played such an exemplary role over recent weeks.

As Her Majesty said before the Queen's Speech, the country is in many respects going through a very sombre period. However, there are some areas of common ground which I think this debate will highlight. My noble friends Lady Sheehan and Lord Chidgey, Lord Sharkey and Lord Bruce will highlight many areas where Liberals and Liberal Democrats have for many years taken a stance on international and development issues.

When much of the visualisation of the British constitution is based upon the ceremony of formal occasions, yesterday's imagery spoke volumes. The last year there was a reduced Queen's Speech was also the year I was born, the year a Prime Minister called an election on the question of who governed Britain. The 2017 version was a Prime Minister calling an election on the statement, "I govern Britain and want a large enough majority to ignore all opposition". However, the people said no. Not only is this House a House of minorities, so is the other place. The 1970s also saw the last time a minority Administration introduced a Queen's Speech—an Administration who would be largely dependent on votes from Northern Ireland Members. Perhaps when some of the press said that one of the party manifestos proposed to take us back to the 1970s, they had it round the wrong way.

It was welcome to hear from the Leader of the House yesterday that the Government will seek to govern with humility and to forge cross-party agreement where they can. Many issues raised in the Queen's Speech and the Government's agenda give us the best opportunity to have that wider consensus. When the Government make progressive moves on the international stage, they will

receive support from these Benches. Humanitarian assistance, maintaining the legal requirement for the UK to meet its commitment to provide 0.7% of national income for international development, the delivery of the Paris Agreement and—more so—unswerving support for meeting the global goals for development are all issues on which we share common ground with the Government. We pledge to work with the Government on advancing them all.

Furthermore, the preparations for a successful Commonwealth summit next year, focusing on young people and with a greater visibility for human rights and LGBTI issues, will also be one of common cause. I pay tribute to the outgoing Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, for her work in seeking the global abolition of the death penalty and tackling sexual violence in conflict-affected areas, issues which we unreservedly supported and will continue to support. In that respect I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his post as he takes on many of these important issues. We look forward to working with him. While he does not represent a Government who command a majority in this House, he commands respect across all parts of the House and will make a significant impact on the department.

On the global stage there is much common ground among us. For as long as this minority Government are in office, we will use our votes to support, strengthen and enforce a progressive international humanitarian, developmental and human rights-based agenda. However, in this context it is correct to highlight our concern that the UK has been less visible in 2017 than it should have been on major global challenges. I serve on the International Relations Committee in your Lordships' House, so ably chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford. Our report in May on the Middle East called for fresh thinking from the Government. It highlighted a lack of consistency in the UK's approach, especially on Syria.

Over the last 12 months—I refer to my entry in the register of interests—I visited the region 15 times, with most visits to Iraq during the military offensive in Nineveh. The imminent military destruction of Daesh in Mosul now needs to be met with a whole-government response to support an environment where a successor to Daesh is not formed. This means the people there need to see local government in the area work for them and have services restored as soon as possible. I press upon the Minister the need for humanitarian assistance to be delivered as soon as security allows—I stress the urgency of this—to the people in the right side of Mosul who have been prisoners of Daesh. They have literally been prisoners, in the basements of their houses, and are starving to death as we debate this week. I know the work of the UK in that area intimately and I admire many of our staff on the ground. UK humanitarian assistance literally saves lives and I hope the Minister may respond positively. Upwards of 70,000 civilians are trapped in that part of Mosul this week.

I also welcome the announcement of a commission to look into extreme ideology. I have the privilege to serve with the British Council All-Party Parliamentary Group, alongside my noble friend Lady Suttie and the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, in its work on tackling

extreme ideology and developing the resilience of young people in the MENA region. I hope that when this work is published in the autumn it will form the basis of cross-party consensus on the need for further thinking on extreme ideology.

On Syria, the committee's report highlighted confusion over the Government's policy, outwith their commitment to humanitarian assistance. In summing up, can the Minister be clear on the Government's position on Assad and whether he would be free to continue to play a role in the future leadership of Syria? Can the Minister also state how much of the £12 billion committed to the conference on support for Syria and the region, which took place in London, has actually been secured and how much has been delivered to the people who need it most in this ongoing humanitarian catastrophe?

In a much-publicised speech, the Foreign Secretary said that the UK was “back east of Suez”, and the Prime Minister said in Bahrain that the UK's new Gulf strategy would deepen further our relationship with the Gulf states, but what is the UK's current position on this tense situation? Does the UK agree with President Trump that Qatar funds terrorism, or does it have a distinct position? What is the UK's position on the most recent developments in Iran? As we abstained from being involved in the outgoing French President's initiative for discussing the Palestinian question, what active steps are the Government taking in challenging Israel on its recent moves in the Occupied Territories? The committee's report said:

“The balance of power in the delivery of peace”—

the two-state solution—

“lies with Israel ... The Government should give serious consideration to now recognising Palestine as a state, as the best way to show its determined attachment to the two-state solution”.

I would welcome the Minister responding to that in his summing up.

I mentioned our steadfast support for the UK meeting its international obligation on 0.7% for developmental aid. This was a welcome element in the Queen's Speech, as it was in the Conservative manifesto, as it was in ours. In fact, it has been in ours since the 1970 general election, so while we may not meet the heights of the numbers of Conservative MPs, at least we have consistency on our side. I greatly admire the noble Lord, Lord Bates, and I think he is an excellent Minister in the department. I hope very much that the Government will not countenance the abolition of the Department for International Development and I hope that the Minister can state that unequivocally in his closing remarks. We have led the world in having a distinct department, setting in many respects the standard for the delivery of development aid and assistance. I hope very much that it will not be subsumed into the Foreign Office.

One area where there will be some equivocation is on what arrangements the UK will have on international trade. The Government sought a mandate for a hard Brexit, where leaving the customs union was a key part of that approach. They did not receive it. If humility was to be on display, it would be the recognition that maintaining membership of the customs union should be in the best interests of British business. Many warned that it was simply unfeasible, as outlined in the Prime

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

Minister's letter triggering Article 50, to negotiate both the terms on leaving and the new trading arrangements simultaneously. This has been the first quite significant defeat for the Government with regard to their negotiating stance.

It also seems that the “no deal is better than a bad deal” rhetoric has been ditched, gladly. When during the campaign Ministers were asked to outline what a bad deal sounded like, they defined what “no deal” actually was. The rhetoric has now moved away from “no deal is better than a bad deal” but now what has seemed to creep in is “no deal is better than a punishment deal”. It is an odd week indeed, when negotiations have started, when the Brexit Secretary's first move is a retreat on the Government's previous position on the process of the negotiations, but the prospect of a punishment agreement being forced upon us is now real. It is just not the right approach to commencing these important negotiations with our European friends.

The speeches this week by the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England have stated in stark terms the economic reality we are now facing and the likelihood of people being poorer and the economy being impacted. Of course the people did not vote for themselves to be poorer; nor did they want the economy to be less developed. But the real admission from the Government of the challenges ahead is a welcome move. The Chancellor has now said that it is in the interests of Britain that we have a significant transitional arrangement for trade. This was not really mentioned in the Minister's speech. The Chancellor said this morning that he could not rule out that this would be for a number of years. Can the Minister confirm that this is the Government's position and whether the European Court of Justice jurisdiction will apply over this period? The Chancellor said that once this was agreed, business could breathe a huge sigh of relief and investment could start again: is this an indication that there is significant business concern?

Overall, there is much that we will agree with—on humanitarian, diplomatic and aid support—and we will provide those elements to the Government. But when it comes to issues of Brexit and our separation from the European Union, we will be forensic in our scrutiny and we will hold this Government to account.

11.50 am

Lord Craig of Radley (CB): My Lords, I join in welcoming—indeed, in rewelcoming—the noble Earl to his portfolio of responsibilities. Off and on he has spoken on defence issues since I first entered your Lordships' House in 1991. He surely deserves the descriptors “strong and stable”, to which I would add “enduring and likeable”.

I welcome the information about ongoing defence issues outlined by the noble Earl. I had hoped to welcome the intention to legislate on combat immunity, a topic dear to my heart, and on some form of time out—a statute of limitations—for bringing historic cases that have arisen during operations. Maybe when the current clouds of uncertainty disperse, these may yet be considered as they surely ought to be. I welcome his references to a flexible employment scheme for the Armed Forces. This deserves strong interest and support.

I turn to whether we should have a further defence and security review. I, for one, would not press for it now. Maximum effort is called for in dealing with the complexities and ramifications of Brexit. The MoD will surely be involved as well. If a defence and security review were to be done thoroughly, it would need the most serious attention and consideration. Would that really be available at this time? I would further argue that the 2015 review was a well-considered effort pointing the way ahead, in particular for the three armed services. I would not consider that any less capability is now called for, rather the opposite. Indeed where there is failure, it is in achieving the aspirations and output of that review in a comprehensive and timely manner. Criticism—serious and informed criticism—has been voiced in recent months and weeks by the Defence Select Committee, for example about Army and Navy shortcomings. For all three services, the critical issue is weakness in equipment strengths and so little resilience if engaged against a well-armed foe.

There are many historic examples of economies and savings assumed to be achievable in defence spending but proving unrealistic and undeliverable. Even the assurances that the UK was meeting the NATO minimum of 2% of GDP are based on challenged and dubious attributions to that budget. The adverse move in the exchange rate for the pound has compounded the problem. Surely it is the output achieved that needs to be measured, not merely the 2% or whatever input, nor the putative efficiency savings assumed.

For those with long experience of defence reviews and their outcomes, I fear it is no real surprise that intentions and aspirations are underfunded. Personally, I go back to the reviews of Duncan Sandys in the 1950s and Denis Healey in the 1960s. This time appears no different: a reluctant Treasury agrees a future programme for defence, but only if underpinned by a massive and demanding programme of efficiencies and economies elsewhere in the defence budget. The MoD, desperate to get its future major equipment programmes sanctioned, feels it has to offer overly ambitious savings to attempt to balance the books to the Treasury's satisfaction. Inevitably, aspiration and achievement are not realised. As we have seen on previous occasions, programmes have to be adjusted, slowed down or modified to attempt to balance the books year on year. Not only does the defence programme suffer, it costs the taxpayer more overall to achieve some if not all of the requirements. Surely, faced with the problems and dangers of the present world, which were well outlined by the noble Earl, this is no time to continue with this pattern of false and fanciful accounting. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, there are real and justifiable concerns that current front-line strengths are far from adequate were we to become involved in hostilities with an enemy that had better defence and combat capability than any we have faced since the early 1990s.

Examples of what might happen are our considerable losses at sea and in the air against the Argentinians in 1982. We lost, to their air attacks, half a dozen fighting ships, with as many badly damaged, more than one-third of our deployed fighter aircraft and numerous helicopters, but we had sufficient strength in numbers to ride out

those considerable setbacks in battle and in the immediate future thereafter. That added strength had been procured many years previously and was operationally capable. Against the Iraqis in the first Gulf War six Tornados were lost, five in a single week. Losses today, from a very much smaller ORBAT than that of the 1980s, on a scale or rate such as those would all too rapidly decimate our combat power, our resilience and our stamina. Surely, too, the credibility of the deterrent lacks realism unless there is a sustainable conventional hard power capability to underwrite it.

We will continue to remain weak unless decisions on increasing numbers and funding are taken to reduce these most serious shortfalls. A step in the right direction is the commitment of extra procurement funds over the life of this Parliament, which was mentioned by the noble Earl. I hope that, for once, this will prove to be an Administration who hold their nerve and live up to this fiscal promise.

11.58 am

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I welcome the outward-looking emphasis in the speeches made so far, especially in the Minister's speech and in that of the noble Lord, Lord Collins. What makes this such an exceptional time is that for perhaps only the second or third time in a couple of centuries, we find ourselves needing, as we come to Brexit, to redefine our whole approach to foreign policy and our place in the world. It should be a principal place, not only defined primarily by GDP, although that is important, or by military adequacy, although that is essential, as the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, set out just now, but by respect internationally for our values, vision and determination and our capacity to deliver those things we promise.

Our aims, as set out by the noble Earl, may be clear, but it is not evident that the combination of vision, values, means and ends is adequately aligned to deliver them. The gracious Speech spoke of taking British values around the world. For that to happen, we need to know what we mean by British values, and they must be based on far more than self-protection in defence and self-interest in trade. They must spring from values lived clearly and coherently at home. Our approach to the international will be defined by the values that we practise within our borders. This is more than ever true in a post-imperial world of free flow of information. Security, trade, commerce and financial transactions are necessary components of a comprehensive approach to the wider world, but they are not sufficient.

In a powerful speech this week, referred to already by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, the Governor of the Bank of England said:

"A decade of radical financial reform was not an end in itself, but rather a means to serve households and businesses better. We must ensure that the real economy reaps its full benefits".

But we must hold the same understanding as we approach Brexit: trade deals, customs unions, single markets, financial passports are all without use unless they are seen as a means to serve individuals, communities and our society. Society and economy are not coterminous, and the values that direct how we act domestically and that we seek to project internationally must recognise that.

Over the past few weeks, it has felt as though we have been overwhelmed by a storm of events that have tested our deepest values with an almost unrelenting ferocity. We are being tested in how we handle not only security but also diversity, integration, social mobility and inequality. The aftermath of the horrific fire at the Grenfell Tower in Kensington has given us particular need to reflect on how we respond. There is no doubt that the response from the emergency services and civic society has been, and continues to be, remarkable. Communities have been revealed as effective. Many however, including the Prime Minister herself, have recognised that the support from the state has been inadequate in its response to those urgently and desperately in need. Such failure is ultimately a failure of values. The worshippers at the Finsbury Park mosque, which I visited the night before last, remind us that freedom to worship without fear is a value we cherish as a nation, which was won at great human cost over many years.

The values that we practise at home reflect our history—good and bad—and are the foundation for the values we take to the world. In numerous ways, we are already of course doing this. I was recently on long visits in the Middle East and Africa, where I saw many examples of the remarkable work being done by the UK Government—by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, DfID and the armed services in particular—in South Sudan and other places. UK forces are protecting deeply fragile communities on behalf of the United Nations. DfID staff tend often to live hard and work hard and effectively. The FCO does remarkable work, but the noble Earl must recognise that it does it on a shoestring.

The responses we make come from our recognition of our history, and our commitment to being that outward-facing country that we must be and our confidence that what we have to offer the world is transformative. But values must be applied and practised consistently, and with an understanding that in all that we do, we recognise the dignity of every human being, regardless of wealth, status or influence. In that context, I refer especially to the poorest and most marginalised, and welcome the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Collins, on the LGBTQ communities. With equality, confidence and justice at home comes the ability to contribute effectively around the world. Without them we will fail.

To apply our values to Brexit, as the process of negotiations begins and develops over the next two years, like many others, I want to argue that we need a structurally based approach in our politics to arrive at cross-party positions that unify us in front of the European Union and have the long-term flourishing of this country at their heart, as well as the urgent need for a process of internal reconciliation between social groups, faiths, generations and regions. The future of this country is not a zero-sum, winner-take-all calculation, but must rest on the reconciled common good arrived at through all our normal debates and diversity. A good Brexit will fulfil the aspiration of a partnership with Europe—spoken of in the gracious Speech. British values and European values are rooted in the same soil, and the great tests of 65 million refugees and the vast effects of climate change will

[THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY]

require European partnership if those values are to be effective for the poorest of the earth and for our own futures. Partnership requires first that our parting is carried out well.

Above all, in our domestic and external policies we need vision if we are to reimagine the future of this country. To quote the Old Testament, Proverbs says:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”.

I hope your Lordships would expect one quote from the Bible. I look forward to the opportunities ahead of us in the coming two years when we in this place can hold the Government and each other to the commitments made in the gracious Speech so that all, whether in this generation or generations to come, especially the weak, poor and powerless, might benefit from the decisions made at this time.

12.05 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, it is always an honour to speak after the most reverend Primate, whom we have really come to regard as almost invariably speaking silver-pure common sense. He has given us some vision in what are undoubtedly sombre times, and perhaps we could do with a few more quotes from the Bible to guide us through the difficulties we face.

I am a bit puzzled that we in this House are in effect debating the changing world order beyond Brexit, the consequences of Brexit and how we adjust to them, but will not be coming to the issue of Brexit itself until later next week. It should really be the other way around, since Brexit is of course part of the much wider global transformation taking place. How we handle Brexit will lead to how we meet and cope with the entirely new world ahead.

If I had been drafting the gracious Speech, which no one asked me to do, I would certainly have added at the end of paragraph 1, after the bit about,

“our future outside the European Union”,

the words, “and stepping into entirely new and volatile international conditions which present our nation with great opportunities as well as great dangers”. This is indeed a time of fast-rising world tensions, as the noble Earl set out very clearly in his opening speech. Russia and America seem to be drifting into an unnecessary war in the hell on earth that is Syria today; there are major tensions in the Far East and the Pacific Rim that could easily escalate into some kind of nuclear exchange; there is renewed instability in the Balkans; the Gulf states are splitting apart; the USA is turning inward to protection and proving an unreliable guide in Middle Eastern affairs; Ukraine is festering; and the rules-based international order, which since World War II has brought prosperity through trade to billions, is now under direct threat. These are all tinderbox material. Any one of them could get out of hand in ways that could do more damage to the lives, safety and welfare of the British people than any Brexit outcome, hard, soft or middling, any election or even Mr Corbyn and his plans for economic reform. If we want to stay secure and prosperous and to check the horrors of terrorism, which tragically we have experienced recently in London and Manchester, then

we must contribute and deploy all our influence, our soft power and, where necessary and effective, an agile hard power, to the limits of our considerable skills, in all these smouldering situations.

As the most recent report from the International Relations Committee, referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, tried to explain, we need a new strategy in the volatile Middle East. We can no longer always rely on American policy to underpin and maintain balance in the region.

There is indeed a new world order, or disorder. Technology and the digital age are unravelling the past global system and the old pillars of international stability: open markets, democracy and the rule of law are all under attack. Fake news and cyberattacks are proliferating, as the noble Earl mentioned, while yawning inequality, or at least the perception of it, is growing all round the world.

The Prime Minister has urged that in these new circumstances we must focus on finding, in her words, “old friends and new partners”,

to adjust to the new conditions. It may be slightly conceited to see that as a gratifying echo of the book I wrote four years ago, *Old Links & New Ties*.

This is a time when whole industries are being destroyed by shifting world power and new technology, with jobs vanishing and incomes being squeezed or lost altogether. How we conduct ourselves with Europe and how we manage and adapt to the national repositioning demanded by these great outside forces is all of a piece. I greatly welcome the words of the new lead Brexit negotiator, Mr Crawford Falconer—no relation, I assume, to our dear friend in this House, the noble and learned former Lord Chancellor—who sees the Brexit step that we are now taking as opening up a “huge strategic opportunity” and a pathway to major reform of the near-moribund World Trade Organization to meet all the new threats and conditions. He is right.

The same applies, in fact, to most of the 20th century institutions, from the UN and Bretton Woods bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank down to and including NATO itself. They have all served us well—but all are now struggling to change. We have to build and join the new networks that are emerging in this age of total connectivity, with the centre of world power and the world economy having shifted. I refer to non-western entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is going ahead without America, the BRICs and IBSA working groups, and many more: it is a new pattern.

China is creating what looks like a new order of organisations and structures to parallel the western or Atlantic model. We have to work with this new partner. I am glad that we are taking a lead in working with China's new international development bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. But we shall have to be more energetic still in involving ourselves in China's gigantic plans for new Silk Roads and trade routes right across Kazakhstan and other central Asian countries and into the heart of Europe—always taking care not to weaken our links with our other great ally in Asia, Japan, which is the third-largest industrial power in the world, with China being the second.

This is where the main growth, the main technological advance and the main markets are going to be. In nearly all these areas, one finds that the prospect of fresh and expanded direct bilateral links with Britain is regarded as most welcome—better in some cases than trying to deal with the cumbersome collective bureaucracy of the EU's other 27 members, with their widely varied interests.

Of course, we now need as well to develop what has been described as the “deep and special relationship” with our European neighbours in innovative and constructive ways. I hope that we are getting on fast with that. I see major scope for far closer links, particularly with France, which is the one truly experienced world power in Europe and in the Middle East. It seems to me to be a no-brainer that we should do this step by step over the coming years.

Obviously, the first stage would be an EEA-type arrangement, to which we are already a contracting party, which allows wide national intervention in border controls. Free movement is being watered down throughout the EU anyway as millions more refugees threaten to come north into Europe from the Maghreb and the Middle East. The EEA allows us to open trade negotiations and deal with many other countries. It is not within the locus of the ECJ and does not cover agriculture and fisheries, which should please our Scottish friends, and is the perfect place to settle for a while before moving on to new relations—by which time the whole pattern of European and world trade will have gone through further revolutions.

In particular, we are going to see the domination of international trade by services of all kinds, in data of all kinds and in information flows—all areas where the single market has not been much good. As an 80%-services economy, this suits us mightily.

That will be especially so with the Commonwealth network of nations, big and small, which use English as the working language. That is certainly one of the old/new networks that we have to strengthen in every way. It is very good news that my noble friend Lord Ahmad is the new Commonwealth Minister, although my noble friend Lady Anelay was excellent, too—and even more that the whole Commonwealth cause is now at last a serious government strategic endeavour, being run from the Cabinet Office, with a team that was formerly a mere six to eight in the FCO and is now expanded to 60 to 80 personnel, at the highest government level. That is real post Brexit repositioning in action, in preparation for the Commonwealth summit and beyond. In all this, we need to prepare and streamline our government organisations, as well as our business sector, to pack far more punch in new trading conditions. DfID should certainly combine more closely with the Foreign Office—and I am extremely glad to see we now have a Minister, the excellent Alistair Burt, who covers both.

In addition, the business visa policy needs changing, and students should be taken out of the immigration figures. It is madness that we have halved our student intake from the dynamic India, to the benefit of America and Germany. Our universities are our spearhead of influence across the world; weaken them and we weaken our whole trading and commercial future.

We have talked of strong and stable government. That is not quite what we have at this precise moment—but we need to remember Charles Darwin. He was the one who said that we need not so much the strongest to survive as those who adapted successfully to changing conditions. So we need to be strong and stable and ready to adapt at every level of government and society to survive and prosper.

The Brexit process is a part of that adaptation but, frankly, only a small part. Our new priorities have to be much wider. As I have said and written, we need to rebuild old links, the Commonwealth network included, and establish new ties, here in Europe and right across the globe. How we set about this is something on which I hope your Lordships' House, for all our faults and problems, can make a really useful contribution. We will try.

12.17 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, we regularly hear the mantra that the security and defence of the nation is the first and most important duty of any Government, yet, once again, as with the last three Queen's Speeches, those charged with our nation's defence forget that truth. Defence and security are first mentioned in paragraph 21 of 28 paragraphs of the gracious Speech—hardly in pole position. The myriad threats beyond our shores do not disappear because of the domestic difficulties we face—and, goodness me, we face a lot of them. If anything, they have worsened, which makes us less safe.

Paragraph 25 of the gracious Speech states:

“My Ministers will ensure that the United Kingdom's leading role on the world stage is maintained and enhanced as it leaves the European Union”.—[*Official Report*, 21/6/17; cols. 6-7.]

We are deluding ourselves. Our soft power is formidable but it is as nothing if not backed by hard power, as has been true for decades. Indeed, it is our military capability that has allowed successive Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries for those decades to stride the world and punch above our weight; it no longer does. The implications for the security of Europe are severe. We and the United States—we should be proud of this—have ensured Europe's defence and security for 70 years. We are able no longer.

Since the 2010 SDSR, the Government have responded to growing concerns about defence, raised by all parties in this House and in the other place, with comfortable words about increased money for defence, meeting NATO's 2% commitment, talk of future orders and so on. That is no longer good enough. As regards money, we all, particularly those who have been in government, know what games can be played—and there is dispute about the validity of the 2%, which is of course a minimum, not a target. The Government must face up to the fact that our forces are underfunded. New money is in theory being produced by efficiencies. These efficiencies are impacting on the lives of our sailors, soldiers and airmen, and on the fighting power of our Armed Forces, which is reducing.

In particular, the Navy has too few ships and men and is having to make incoherent cuts to keep within the budget—for example, paying off “Diligence” and HMS “Ocean”, and not having any surface-to-surface or air-to-surface missiles for the next few years. This is

[LORD WEST OF SPITHEAD]

not an abstract issue. For a number of years, we will have ships deployed around the globe that may suddenly come across an opponent because things have escalated, and they will have to fight. I have done this, as have many of us here. We will have ships sunk and people killed. I have been in that position. We are standing into danger.

The paying off of HMS "Ocean", it having just been given a £65 million refit to run for another five years, means that we no longer have a full amphibious capability. Does our nation really understand that? The Navy's desperate need for 4,000 more people—they were cut in SDSR 2010—is part of the problem, which is also impacting on such things as commando numbers. Going back to SDSR 2010, there was a one-third cut to our military capability. Not another department in this country suffered such a massive cut in its capability. Can you imagine if a third of all NHS hospitals had been closed?

We have only 19 escorts. This is a national disgrace for our great maritime nation—I have touched on it before. Two of them are tied up alongside because of lack of manpower. Our destroyers have major intercooler problems and there is no rapid-fix programme for that, although something is in train. The reality is that we have only 12 escorts fully capable for operations, one of which will always be in for a major refit. These are the Type 23 frigates. The oldest is 26 years old, the youngest 15, and the ships were designed for an 18-year life. The Government have yet to explain fully how they will replace all these ships, which are due to leave service at the rate of one per year from 2023 onwards, let alone increase the total number of escorts by the 2030s, which the noble Earl kindly confirmed is the Government's aim.

When will the shipbuilding strategy be produced laying down the steady drumbeat of orders promised by the noble Earl to be issued in the spring? Is it still the Government's intention to increase frigate numbers by the 2030s? Will the "Queen Elizabeth" meet this tidal window, which started yesterday, to sail for sea trials? The tidal window is open for only about 10 days, I think. If not, when will she sail for sea trials?

Far from increasing in numbers, the Navy is actually shrinking. I fear that the Royal Navy is not capable of doing what our nation expects of it. I say that because I go round and talk to people and they think it can do things that it no longer can. Preventing war, and defending our nation and people if war happens, are more important than any other government spending priority. If Ministers get that wrong, the nation will never forgive them. The costs in blood and treasure are enormous. Studies have shown that the plan to pay off "Endurance" for a saving of £16 million prompted the Argentinian junta to invade the Falkland Islands. The final cost to this nation was £6 billion and almost 300 lives. The Government have a choice of whether to spend what is required to ensure the safety of our nation, dependencies and people or not. At present, I believe they are getting the choice wrong.

The talk of a fisheries Bill is of interest. Never have we been less capable of protecting and controlling our exclusive economic zone. The control of our inshore waters, ports and coastline is problematic at the moment. The National Maritime Information Centre, established

as a result of a National Security Forum recommendation in 2010, is a national treasure. It is wonderful that it has happened, but its job is to produce a clear surface picture—of what is going on all round our coast and, indeed, the world—and facilitate information exchange between government departments and agencies. There are insufficient ships and no centralised command and control of assets to protect and patrol our inshore waters based on the intelligence that NMIC gives.

The Royal Navy has ensured the survival and wealth of our nation over several hundred years. We need to wake up to the fact that successive cuts have gone too far. No matter how good our people—and, my goodness, we have good people in all three services; they are splendid—without sufficient ships, in the case of the Navy, it is nothing. We are taking risk upon risk and suddenly, quite unexpectedly—I can promise that this will happen, because it always does in this very chaotic and nasty world—it may affect our nation's survival.

12.24 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to take part today in this first day of debate on the gracious Speech. I will restrain my remarks to those relating to the brief on which I speak on behalf of the Lib Dem Benches: international development.

That the 0.7% of GNI to be spent on international development featured in the gracious Speech pleased but did not surprise me. The Government have shown that they recognise that, as Britain leaves the EU, it will need to pull together all its friends and influence around the world—and how better to maintain and enhance the UK's leading role on the world stage than through the depth of knowledge and network of global decision-makers that DfID has developed over many years? The Government have acknowledged that influence, backed up by funds, will be a potent weapon in their arsenal to curry favour around the globe as they seek trade deals. Indeed, the Overseas Development Institute recently published a paper, entitled *Aid, Exports and Employment in the UK*, showing that the giving of development assistance has a positive effect on the economy of the donor country, too. It shows that direct bilateral aid in 2014 led to the creation of 12,000 UK jobs, illustrating yet again that targeting aid to alleviate the suffering of some of the poorest people in the world not only is the moral thing to do but ultimately benefits us here at home.

While I welcome the safeguarding of DfID's budget, I hope that the Government do not lose sight of the need to meet internationally recognised standards on what constitutes aid. Given that the Conservative manifesto gave cause for concern, as it opened the door to redefining development spending, I am seeking reassurance from the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, whom I welcome to his new post, that the recently announced structure of joint DfID and FCO Ministers is not indicative of a step towards watering down the focus of aid spending to alleviate poverty. I hope that this reassurance will be forthcoming. The FCO needs to be held accountable for its use of aid money, just as DfID is. I would like to know how DfID will work to ensure that aid spending by other departments meets the standards of transparency, accountability and development impact that DfID sets itself.

I will not keep your Lordships much longer; the only other subject that I touch on today is the iniquities of our relationship with Saudi Arabia and, in doing so, I thank Amnesty International for the information that I cite. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported that more than 4,000 civilians, including 1,200 children, have been killed and more than 7,000 civilians wounded since the conflict in Yemen began in March 2015. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that, by October 2016, more than 3.27 million people had been forcibly displaced in the conflict and nearly 21.2 million people—80% of the population—were reliant on humanitarian assistance. The UK is the fourth-largest donor to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and yet that work is severely undermined by the UK itself continuing to supply the Saudi-led coalition with military equipment that has been alleged to have been used to destroy or disrupt that very same humanitarian aid—where is the sense, or even the morality, in that?

Not only are the lives of Yemeni civilians at risk from coalition air strikes, but so, too, are those of British-funded aid workers. Coalition air strikes have hit an Oxfam warehouse and two MSF hospitals as well as destroying transport infrastructure such as roads and bridges, which disrupts the flow of food, medical equipment, supplies and other aid from ports. On the one hand, the UK funds aid workers to send into this crisis and, on the other, sells arms to the regime implicated in serious violations of international and humanitarian human rights law. I ask again: where is the sense in that? Select Committee reports by the International Development, Foreign Affairs and BEIS Select Committees have all raised serious concerns about the legality of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the context of the war in Yemen and the widespread reports of the use of air strikes in violation of relevant international law.

United Nations sustainable development goal 16 speaks of peace. Without peace there can be no prosperity and no well-being for any of us. The dreadful terrorist events of the last few weeks have brought home to us here in Britain how precious that peace is. If we are to fulfil our commitments to meeting the sustainable development goals, we must do more than pay lip service. Surely it is time to suspend UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia and re-establish the Committees on Arms Export Controls to ensure adequate parliamentary oversight over such a complex area.

12.31 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, this is the first debate on the Address since last June's referendum resulted in a narrow majority in favour of leaving the EU. It is also the first since the assumption of office by a new US president, Donald Trump, whose "America First" slogan, and, even more so, policies on climate change, trade issues, NATO, the UN and human rights, put him at cross purposes with our own policy objectives. Therefore, I make no apologies for focusing my remarks on these two matters and their consequences for our own foreign policy-making.

Much of the debate about Brexit concentrates on important, but often quite narrow and technical, questions of trade in both goods and services, the status of EU

national, including our own, and our future domestic policies on regulation, immigration, agriculture and fisheries. That is, of course, exactly as it should be, and those aspects will be debated later in this debate next week. They are important matters. We must not, however, overlook the wider strategic consequences of our decision to leave the EU in terms of Europe's security and the future direction of the European Union's foreign policies. It seems to have been almost completely overlooked at the time of our vote last June that we risked turning our backs on something like 500 years of British foreign policy, during which we played an integral—often crucial—part in the formulation of policies relating to European security and the balance of power among our nearest neighbours—an area you could describe as stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, to coin a phrase. Now we risk becoming not just semi-detached but fully detached from that tradition, and that to our cost, I suggest, as we found in earlier periods when we occasionally drifted off into isolation.

It is no good thinking that these risks can be avoided simply by repeating meaningless mantras such as, "We are leaving the EU, but not leaving Europe". Nor is NATO a full answer to the problem, although it is certainly part of the answer. It seems that the problem requires us to fashion a close, operationally effective relationship on foreign and security policy with the European Union, and in particular with its principal members, France and Germany. Several other previous speakers, including the noble Lord, Lord Howell, concentrated on that point. I hope that the Minister will say something about how we plan to set about doing that when he replies to the debate, because so far we have heard nothing but aspirations in this area.

Then there are the challenges we face from across the Atlantic, not just from the erratic and intemperate policy pronouncements which have so far been the hallmark of the Trump Administration. There are more fundamental problems than that. The policies of that Administration are already undermining the whole structure of a rules-based international community, which successive British Governments have, over the last 70 years, worked so hard to create and on which our own future prosperity and security will rely to an even greater extent if and when we leave the European Union. An adequate response cannot simply consist of the rather feeble kinds of triangulation which presumably motivated our refusal to sign up to the statement of France, Germany and Italy when the US notified its decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement on climate change, nor the rather pusillanimous attitude we have taken to supporting a two-state solution to the problem of Palestine. Nor is—I am afraid that I agree with my noble friend Lord Ricketts—the untimely invitation to President Trump to make a state visit to London this year likely to help very much. Perhaps the Minister could elucidate what the absence of a reference to that in the gracious Speech is meant to mean. However, of course we must not fall back into that knee-jerk anti-Americanism which has so often been a feature of the left in British politics. That relationship of the United States will be of crucial value to this country long beyond the tenure in office of a particular US President.

[LORD HANNAY OF CHISWICK]

The two themes I have mentioned criss-cross when one examines the chaos in the Middle East, a set of issues which were addressed in the report of your Lordships' International Relations Committee, which several other speakers have mentioned and which I very much trust we shall have an opportunity to debate in full before the Summer Recess. The intemperate nature of US policy-making has been clear in the Middle East most recently in the rhetorical onslaught against Iran, which took place only two days after the very welcome re-election of President Rouhani, who said that he was committed to greater engagement with the outside world. To stoke up Saudi-Iranian rivalry is not in Britain's interest. Plenty of criticism can be levied against some aspects of Iran's external policy. However, I hope that we will work for a kind of *modus vivendi* between these two important regional powers, not organise a Thirty Years' War between Sunni and Shia. Perhaps the Minister can say how we view the current tensions between members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which have broken out in the bans on travel between a number of Qatar's neighbours and that emirate. That, too, does not seem to be likely to move the region into a better place.

12.39 pm

Lord Sterling of Plaistow (Con): My Lords, I have decided to concentrate on things that I have said in the past, not because there is anything new that I wish to say but purely to add strength to the things we have considered in previous debates.

First, perhaps I may bring up a point that I raised months ago. The very first sentence of the gracious Speech contains the words,

"my Government's priority is to secure the best possible deal".

I think that in all respects that last word is a shocking one to use. Anybody who does a business deal knows that that is not the right word. If you really want to continue in friendship and in partnership, as we emphasise that we do all the time, you come to an "agreement". You do not want to leave the table feeling that—I could use stronger words—"Somehow or other, I've got my leg over. I've got the best out of it", and so on. You carry on on the basis of, "I want to do it again—I want us to be together", and I implore the Government and the media to stop using that term. When I heard it on Her Majesty's lips yesterday, I was sure that others in this House must have felt the same way.

We are very fortunate in having my noble friend Lord Howe leading this debate. His experience and knowledge of defence and foreign affairs—and if I may say so, just his sheer common sense—are known by us all. We are also fortunate in having the Chancellor because, as far as I am concerned, without a strong economy nothing happens—a strong economy dictates everything. Of course, the Chancellor has the advantage of having a background in defence, having been the Defence Secretary. Therefore, I hope that our all-party approach, particularly in this House and certainly in the other place, will lend weight to what we are talking about.

The National Security Council—I had the honour of being one of the founding members of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy—is certainly

a worthy enterprise, but does it work properly? In my view—a view shared by others—it does not. It is not set up properly, and a key factor that I would like the Government to consider is that the chiefs should be invited to form a very important subordinate committee of the National Security Council in the years to come.

Points about foreign policy have been raised today. We need vision and clarity. Several noble Lords have talked about our values and what they stand for. Many small countries look to us for the sorts of values that they too treasure.

As many of your Lordships are aware, I am a strong supporter of achieving our aims in the Brexit negotiations. However, as time goes on, I am troubled by one aspect of them. They cannot dominate everything. As has already been mentioned, it is events that dominate, and the Brexit negotiations cannot be the key factor for the next two, three, four or five years. In my view, the defence of the realm and security on all fronts—cyber or whatever—are more important, because events could push Brexit completely to one side if things get out of control. Therefore, I feel, and have requested, that we should have a debate on defence—in particular, to ask whether the Government will have a full defence review, although I know that some will ask whether it would serve much purpose. However, we need more money, and if our armed services are to do the job that is expected of them in this new, global world, a full defence review in the round will demonstrate their needs very clearly. I suggest that a big factor in the negotiations in Europe—certainly with the eastern European countries—will be that enhancing our hard power will play an important part, to say the least, in our role in NATO and, unquestionably, with the Americans in Washington.

I do not have much more to say other than to ask the Ministers to seriously consider not allowing events to dictate our future, although unfortunately we will have no control over that. Perhaps I may leave it to my noble friend Lord Howe—and of course I very much welcome my noble friend Lord Ahmad to his new role—to look at the depth of our foreign policy and to bear in mind that defence is still a key factor for any Government.

12.45 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, looking back to 22 February 2016—the day that David Cameron announced the referendum—Britain was flying. We were the fastest-growing economy in the western world. We were the envy of Europe. Four months later, on 23 June, we had the 52:48 referendum result. Our world has changed since then. Look at the turmoil we are in a year later. Far from flying and being the envy of Europe, we are now the laughing stock of Europe.

Just look at what is going on. The Brexiteers said a year ago, "Look at Europe. They're doing so badly. We're doing so well. It's in a mess". Today, Europe is growing faster than Britain. The pound has weakened. Inflation is six times higher than the 0.5% that it was a year ago. Today, inflation is 3% and wage growth is 1.7%. Over the whole of the past year, Brexit overshadowed everything in Parliament and took up so much of our time.

The Prime Minister tried to sideline Parliament to implement Article 50. It was only with the big defeats suffered by the Government here in the House of

Lords that the Prime Minister had to call the election, which has exposed a Prime Minister who, quite frankly, has not listened. She has not listened to Parliament, business or the people. The gracious Speech talks about establishing new policies on immigration. The Prime Minister has not listened on immigration and the target of tens of thousands. She has not listened to universities. I am proud to say that the University of Birmingham, where I am chancellor, and the Cambridge Judge Business School, where I chair the advisory board, have just been awarded gold in the new teaching excellence framework. International students bring £25 billion into the UK. They are one of the strongest forms of soft power in this country, yet they are still treated as immigrants in the net migration figures. The Prime Minister refused to listen and take them out of those figures.

Yet the Prime Minister is completely unlike Margaret Thatcher, the lady who was not for turning. She has U-turned time after time, whether on national insurance for the self-employed, no election until 2020 and calling a snap election, or social care measures in the manifesto. The Prime Minister does not just U-turn; she pirouettes more than Darcey Bussell.

The gracious Speech talks about new Bills on trade and customs which will help to implement an independent trade policy. The noble Earl the Minister told us that the Department for International Trade is having high-level dialogues. Liam Fox, our illustrious Trade Minister, speaks of “going global” and opening up to the new world. How naive is this? It took the Canadians eight years to secure an EU-Canada free trade agreement. In a BBC radio programme, the lead negotiator for Canada said he does not think that Brexit will happen.

During the visit in November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought up with Prime Minister Theresa May that movement of people is important for India. We talk about trade deals, but there can be no trade deal without looking at the movement of people as well. The Indian High Commissioner here, Mr YK Sinha, has said very clearly that India is open to a bilateral trade deal but there will be no trade deal without looking at the movement of people. Look at the realities of a country such as India, with 1.25 billion people. How many bilateral trade deals does India have with the rest of the world? Nine, and not one with a western country.

These trade deals are meant to support the UK in making a smooth exit from the European Union, ensure that UK businesses are able to benefit from trade with the rest of the world and cement the UK's leading role as a great global trading nation. What a contradiction this is. On the one hand, the Brexiteers say, “You do not need a free trade deal with Europe—look at America and India, they deal with Europe and they do not have free trade deals with Europe”. On the other hand, they say, “The solution to all our problems is to do free trade deals with the rest of the world, which we can do once we leave the European Union”. Why do people not see through this nonsense? People have got to wake up to this. We are already one of the most open economies in the world. Trade already makes up 65% of our GDP. We are already the third-highest recipient of foreign direct investment in the

world and the highest recipient of foreign direct investment in the EU. To leave the EU would be to leave 50% of our trade—45% of our exports and 55% of our imports.

The noble Lord, Lord Sterling, talked about defence. I am delighted that we are continuing to commit to the 2% NATO spending target. We are not going to join any EU army. On the other hand, I would go so far as to say that we owe so much to our EU membership that I would pay the £8 billion a year net to the EU just for the peace that we have had not only because of NATO but because of our EU membership.

Regarding security, Governments over the past years have been absolutely negligent given the tragic events that have taken place. We have cut our police forces by 20,000 officers. The number of police we have now is at the level we had before 9/11. On top of those 20,000, we have also cut the 26,000 neighbourhood policing officers. I do not see them around the streets anymore. They are the ones who were a deterrent, who picked up information and gave security, and they are gone. We also hear about 1,500 more armed police. At the time of the IRA problems in the 1980s we had 5,000 armed police officers in London alone. Today, we have barely 5,000 in the whole country.

The Prime Minister said after the awful attacks that we are going to give more power to our security and police forces. However, did she say immediately, as she should have, that we are going to bring back the 20,000 and the 26,000 and put more armed police officers on our streets? That is what should have been done straightaway.

On the negotiations, David Davis has spoken about the summer of battles that will take place. We all know what happened on the first day of the negotiations. The Minister spoke about exiting the EU with certainty, continuity and confidence. Although I am sure his intentions are good, one of the sad realities of Brexit is that Britain is losing its standing and respect in Europe and the global community. This puts us in a much weaker position. We are negotiating against all the odds. We are one country against 27. We are 65 million whereas the rest number 500 million. We are up against the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council, and we also have a weak Government right now. We need the respect and confidence of the world.

We have seen clearly that public opinion is changing swiftly. In its latest survey—with the *Mail on Sunday*, of all papers—Survation, one of the few polling organisation to correctly predict a hung Parliament, suggests that 69% of the British public oppose the Prime Minister's hard-Brexit approach and 53% back a second referendum. This supports what I have been saying since 24 June 2016, that Brexit may never happen. An analysis of MPs suggests that if there were a free vote in the other place, there would be a 44% majority in favour of remain. As we know, probably 70% of the membership of this House is in favour of remain.

The silver lining, one hopes, is that people will wake up. People were fooled by the claims about £350 million on the side of the bus, and some are being fooled to this day. They think that there is no turning back. The Prime Minister said that there will be no turning back

[LORD BILIMORIA]

after she triggered Article 50, whereas the noble Lord, Lord Kerr—the person who wrote Article 50—has said time and again that we can turn back at any time simply by saying, “We do not want to do this. Unilaterally, we withdraw”. I suggested doing so when I was interviewed on LBC by Iain Dale and he laughed. However, he who laughs last laughs loudest. It was thrown at us last year that we have to respect the will of the people. Following an election—even if a party gets into government with 50.001% of the vote—you respect the will of the people. The reality, however, is that in five years’ time, the people will be able to change their mind and throw that Government out. But in this case the people are not being allowed to change their mind. Where is the will of the people in that? What will the people think in 2019—if that is when the decision is made—when they have all the information in front of them? What will happen when the youngsters turn out to vote? They did not do so earlier but did in the recent election. It is the will of the people at that time that will need to be respected, not something that happened the year before.

Bill George, who taught me at the Harvard Business School, recently wrote about the strategy for steady leadership in an unsteady world. He said that in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, leaders have to have vision, understanding, courage and adaptability. It is that adaptability that we will need in order to get through Brexit.

The Minister spoke about creating a secure and better future for our people. In reality, it is only a matter of time before the people see that the Brexit emperor has no clothes. Given the option of a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit, the opinion of the British people at that time will probably be: “Why not just stay with what we’ve got, which is the best of both worlds?”. As President Macron has said and as the rest of the EU would welcome, it would be much better for us to end up staying in the EU, and there may well be no Brexit whatever.

12.54 pm

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, I adopt many of the wise words of the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and indeed of his mentor, Bill George. As always, Shakespeare had the right words for it. In “Macbeth”, Macduff admirably sums up the state of our nation:

“Confusion now hath made his masterpiece”—

or “turmoil”, as the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, has said.

The Queen’s Speech comes in the wake of two failed government gambles: first, the EU referendum and, secondly, the recent and unnecessary general election. The Government proposed; the people disposed. As we start the EU negotiations, we now have what Mr Osborne, the former Chancellor, described as “a dead woman walking”, yet further weakened by the insensitive response to the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. I understand that there will be a Statement on that later. That tragedy is a further sad illustration of the state of our nation: a widening social divide and government complacency. The Government have sacked the chief executive of the local authority, but, despite accepting mistakes, all their Ministers remain in office.

I have lived in Swansea all my life, but I have also been a resident of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for almost 60 years. I was a councillor in the neighbouring, adjoining ward of Golborne, which also suffers from multi-deprivation. I was a member of the first neighbourhood law council in the country there and of the first urban parish council. No borough has such extremes of wealth between north and south as Kensington. There is a difference of 13 years in life expectancy between the north and the south. There has been Conservative rule from time immemorial in the town hall. They are decent people but unaware of the realities of the north of the borough. The council has amassed huge and increased surpluses. It has kept council tax levels the same for years, and I and other council tax payers received a rebate of £100 in 2014. Last year, the council received a quarter more in local authority rent income than it spent on council housing. Faced with such glaring inequalities, is there anything in the Queen’s Speech, I ask rhetorically, which might reduce them? Brexit, which is obviously the main theme—the leitmotif—of the Queen’s Speech, will certainly mean higher food prices as a result of the depreciation of sterling. We know that the poorest people spend a higher proportion of their budget on food.

Mention is made of improvements in our housebuilding, yet in Kensington and Chelsea property prices rocket. Young people have no hope of starting on the ownership ladder but can only rent, often from foreign buyers who buy off plan. I commend the Government for their initiative in instituting a register of beneficial ownership of property for UK buyers and committing to a similar scheme for foreign buyers, in part to counter money laundering of the oligarchs and others. Often, the properties are simply investments and remain empty. Here, as everywhere, sunlight is the best disinfectant. Obviously, these inequalities did not start with this Government and are replicated nationally and internationally.

At least the Government have a good record on overseas aid. I join my noble friend Lord Collins in commending the continuation of the 0.7% of GNI. Like him, I question the possible danger of vacating the high ground: the Government are now seeking the agreement of OECD member states to revise the definition of aid so that certain military expenditure is included. I recognise that there is some merit in this—without security there would be no development. It is an arguable case. However, others fear that this will be the thin end of the wedge. What has been done? What has been the response from OECD members? What are the prospects of evolving a new definition?

The effects of the “confusion”, in Shakespeare’s terms, are apparent also in the Government’s approach to Brexit. The Government started on the wrong foot. Their objectives are not clear save, as in the first line of the Queen’s Speech,

“to secure the best possible deal”.—[*Official Report*, 21/6/17; col. 5.]

Is that Mr Hammond’s deal or Dr Fox’s deal? There is certainly no consensus in the government party. Should the priority be on jobs or immigration? The Prime Minister herself lacks credibility. Before the referendum,

when she emerged from her fugitive and cloistered corner, she argued for remain, clearly seeing it then as being in the UK interest. Now she espouses Brexit with the zeal of the convert, treating our partners as though they were enemies.

On foreign affairs generally, we retain many advantages from the post-Second World War settlement. We remain members of the P5 of the Security Council and of NATO, which is ever more important, and we have excellent Armed Forces and intelligence communities. Yet let us be brutally realistic: whatever form Brexit takes, it will mean a much diminished international status. We will be weakened by ceasing to be part of the EU team at the UN, in international trade negotiations and by leaving the *directoire* of France, Germany and ourselves. We will be forced to move, inexorably, more into the orbit of the United States. We clearly must retain the best possible relationship with the United States, preparing for an eventual post-Trump US. We will be less relevant in the Middle East, Ukraine and Iran. Any lingering illusions about our role as a bridge between the EU and the US will be undermined by our withdrawal. No doubt the *Daily Mail* will trumpet that, at last, we have an independent foreign policy. That concept ended with our glorious retaking of the Falklands some 35 years ago. Now we increasingly need alliances. Even an associate status with the EU is not the same as being a full team member.

How do we best work closely with the EU and wider Europe? Perhaps the nearest parallel was almost 60 years ago. I was in the Foreign Office when the door to the Common Market seemed to shut. To avoid isolation, we hastily searched around for institutions that brought us together with the six. Coupled with the cul-de-sac of EFTA, we looked at the Western European Union, which was looking for a role. We used it in ways well beyond its original concept. The Commonwealth is only marginally relevant in this context. We have a similar dilemma today. Is there any equivalent to the Western European Union? EFTA may assume a new importance. Of course, an additional benefit for the Government is that the EFTA Court will allow them to escape from their undertaking to their right wing not to be subject to the European Court of Justice. Frankly, that is no more than a conjuring trick because the EFTA Court has broadly the same jurisdiction as the European Court of Justice. Let us look at the 47 members of the Council of Europe—obviously a weaker institution. It is puzzling that the Government flirted with the idea of withdrawing from the European Court of Human Rights, which would effectively mean leaving the Council of Europe as a whole.

Finally, the only case that at the moment proves difficult for us in relation to the European Court of Human Rights is the Hirst judgment on prisoners' voting rights. I urge the Government to look again at this. There may now be a majority in the House of Commons that would allow the Government to follow what has been our excellent record so far in implementing judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and to accept one of the possible, pragmatic options in complying with the Hirst judgment.

1.05 pm

Baroness Young of Hornsey (CB): My Lords, it is with great sadness that we recall all the tragic events that have occurred since your Lordships' House was last in session. As is often the case, whatever the nature, whether in this country or overseas, deliberate or negligent, the loss of life can bring out the best and worst in people. We still have much work to do on community cohesion, addressing all kinds of inequalities and building common value systems.

While the Government's focus is the legislative consequences of leaving the European Union, we must continue to analyse, monitor and review existing legislation. I am referring to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and, more specifically, Section 54 on transparency in supply chains. Thus I was pleased to see modern slavery appear briefly in the Queen's Speech. Much has been said about regulation and private enterprise recently and no doubt this debate will continue as the Government's legislative programme progresses through the coming Session. Often, business demands that there be less red tape. However, this is not always or inevitably the case and I hope the Government will listen to the responsible businesses that understand very well that further regulation is needed in some instances.

As many noble Lords will know, I tabled a Private Member's Bill last Session with the aim of strengthening the Modern Slavery Act, particularly Section 54 on transparency in supply chains. Sadly, the Government did not appear keen to adopt my amendments and we withdrew the Bill as we recognised that one way or another it would run out of time in the other place. With some refinement and adjustments, I again entered the ballot for Private Members' Bills. I wrote this speech last night but now have the result of the ballot: I am number 55. Clearly my luck ran out because last year I was number 2. However, that does not mean I will give up on this.

During the time we have been away from the House, I travelled to a number of venues in the UK and overseas, and had conversations via phone, email, face-to-face et cetera, discussing the legislation on transparency in supply chains. A wide range of people from businesses, NGOs, law enforcement, unions and civil society are concerned that the current political climate is a challenging one in which to be trying to make this ground-breaking Act work as it should. A significant proportion of these concerns are connected to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

Even leaving aside the potentially damaging economic and cultural impact on the creative industries in general, and in particular the fashion industry, with which I have been working, there is the question of how we are to maintain efficient and effective relations with our European neighbours when it comes to ethical and sustainable practices in the industry. There is a fear that the progress made, for example in promoting and enabling transparency in supply chains, will suffer a setback. Working across jurisdictions is never straightforward. How much more complicated is it about to become in this climate of uncertainties?

With regard to modern slavery, there are positive indications that other jurisdictions are seriously investigating potential legislation similar to our Section 54.

[BARONESS YOUNG OF HORNSEY]

As well as the pioneering work of the California Act, with which many of us are familiar, France, the Netherlands and, shortly we hope, Australia have also committed to legislation in this area.

The key feature of Section 54 is that each commercial company operating in the UK with a turnover of £36 million or more must produce a statement that demonstrates how that company intends to address unsafe and abusive labour practices in its supply chains. That statement must be uploaded annually to the company's website in a prominent place and signed off by a member of the board of directors. As the cut-off point for submitting statements for the end of the first year approaches, I am mindful that although we have made some progress we are nowhere near where we need to be if we are to make significant in-roads on the scourge of modern slavery in our businesses' supply chains. Some 2,000 statements have now been uploaded but this is out of, potentially, between 12,000 and 17,000 companies. What efforts are being made to improve compliance with the law in this regard? When will monitoring and reviewing the implementation of Section 54 be made available for us all to see?

As I said, I have been working with the fashion industry—now worth \$3 trillion globally—for some years. More recently I have been trying to engage with the Premier League—it contributes a whopping £3.4 billion to the UK economy—and some of the clubs. Every one of the 20 top-tier clubs should have a modern slavery statement. It is clear that there is quite a wide gap between clubs in the quality of their statements. I have started working with these two sectors principally because they both have a global reach and their activities encompass a whole range of things from garments to, in the case of football, kits, security, stewarding, hospitality, catering, construction, cleaning and IT—all services where there is a risk of hostile labour conditions, both here in Britain and overseas. There is also a real opportunity for the English Premier League and the constituent clubs to help raise awareness of forced labour and other abuses in supply chains, as well as to address their own issues. Given that some clubs are clearly struggling to compile their statements and a feasible implementation strategy, which is also the case with some fashion companies, I hope that the Premier League has plans to help raise the bar on this with its member clubs.

Certainly, the British Retail Consortium has been working hard with a number of the major retailers, along with organisations such as Electronics Watch, the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Institute for Human Rights and Business, the UN Global Compact Network and, of course, Anti-Slavery International, of which I am a patron. All those organisations, among many others, not only passively support strengthening this area of the Act but are actively working with members and colleagues to ensure that this innovative piece of legislation fulfils its potential.

Business-focused organisations are working towards forming coalitions and alliances to make faster, deeper progress towards substantially diminishing modern forms of slavery in supply chains. For example, the UN Global Compact Network modern slavery workshop covers a wide range of businesses from security to retail,

and the BRE, formerly known as the Building Research Establishment, has brought together professional bodies within the construction industry—another major area of risk of abusive practices—including architects, builders, surveyors and engineers, to try to address this issue. This is particularly important with regard to major infrastructure projects such as HS2 and Hinkley Point. It is vital that the Government ensure that public bodies take every possible precaution to ensure that their supply chains are free of labour abuses. In addition, World Vision Canada and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are fully engaged in working with Governments internationally to introduce analogous legislation.

Next year's CHOGM—the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting—affords an opportunity to raise a number of human rights issues, including, as suggested by the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, the persecution of LGBTI individuals and communities. I want to add modern slavery to the list of urgent subjects that should be discussed at that meeting.

The many offers of help and active support demonstrate that most reputable companies do not see Section 54 as a burden or unnecessary red tape; rather, I am being pushed by those companies to urge the Government to introduce stronger and more robust regulation and monitoring of that legislation. That has become absolutely apparent over the months I have been working on this. I look forward to working with colleagues, including Kevin Hyland, the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, and the Government to make sure that Section 54 does what it was intended to do; that is, contribute to the reduction in gross labour abuses in supply chains both in the UK and internationally.

1.14 pm

Lord Balfe (Con): My Lords, I see that the House is filling up but I doubt it is because I am speaking. I will speak about defence and then foreign and Commonwealth affairs, but I will preface the whole thing by welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his new role. I dealt with him extensively in his previous one, when he looked after the regulating of aircraft. He will now be spending his time getting on them so he will be doubly pleased that he put so much work into making sure that they are safe and efficient.

I do not think I have ever quoted the DUP before but I will start with a quote from its manifesto:

“When the public finances improve we believe it will be appropriate to have a new National Security and Strategic Defence Review. The 2015 Review demonstrated a lack of strategic ambition and was too much a product of expenditure limitations”.

I echo that sentiment. In the post-EU world that we are moving into, the security and defence capacity of this country will be our unique selling point on the world stage, and it is absolutely vital that we get it right.

I believe we have become far too obsessed with the 2% target. We are a P5 power. We should not be setting our defence targets alongside those of nations that are, frankly, less prepared to engage in military operations than we are. We need a first-class defence force. We look at the United States and we see defence expenditure at 3.61%, even after substantial reductions, and I would like to feel that our defence review, if we

have one, will not be aimed at how little we can spend but at how much we need to spend to play an effective role in the defence of the western world.

I welcome the points made by the Government on legal claims against the Armed Forces. I do not have the length of experience of the noble Lord, Lord West, although I had a few years in the Territorial Army many years ago. If you are in a battle situation, you cannot be wondering whether some firm of lawyers is going to be chasing round after you. I welcome the decision by the Defence Secretary to seek to opt out of the European Convention on Human Rights prior to future military operations. I hope that will be maintained and we will continue to do what we have said we will do, which is to stop vexatious claims against the Armed Forces. This is not helping us to be a decent defence country with a decent defence capacity.

I welcome what is being done for veterans but if you look at the situation of veterans in the United Kingdom compared with the United States, where they are honoured members of society, we still see instances where soldiers are asked not to wear their uniforms in public. In the United States soldiers are encouraged to wear their uniforms and given priority in certain public services, and I would like to see this. We see many examples and last weekend we saw a particularly petty one:

“‘Blinkered’ MoD prunes hoes for heroes”.

This was a gardening project—horticultural therapy for people severely disabled in war. What is the saving? Just £350,000. This is peanuts to the department, and I quote the Ministry of Defence's words—I am not making this up—in the article:

“There will always be some instances when we're not able to use public money to support their services”.

Are we living in the real world? “Their services”? These are people who have had their limbs blown off and for whom we are asking for a minor contribution to help them settle into a better life. When I was in Washington not that long ago, Congress ran a golfing tournament where members of Congress and the Senate went out and played golf to raise charitable money for the veterans' association of the United States, for limbless ex-servicemen. If we could do something more in that way, we would be doing a lot better.

I turn briefly to a couple of matters where we need to sort out what to do on foreign policy and defence. First, what is to be our attitude to continuing to participate in joint EU affairs in a military capacity? For instance, will there continue to be a naval input into Operation Sophia and the Navfor operation against piracy off the Somali coast? There is a precedent: Norway is a participant in the Somali operation. I hope that we will not only continue but make a fairly strong statement as to our policy on future operations of this nature, because when the EU plans its joint efforts we will not be at the table. But those countries will wonder whether we will be there and we need a fairly strong statement of principle about our attitude to future operations of this kind. I would also be interested—this is where we stray on to an FCO point—to know what our planned disengagement is from the European External Action Service. A lot of able Foreign Office personnel are serving with the External

Action Service. Will they all be withdrawn by March 2019? Will there be a phased withdrawal? Will we continue to give any support to the External Action Service or not?

Finally, I echo the words of the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, about the importance of keeping trade unions involved. We often forget the contribution of our trade union movement through the TUC international committee, through its commitment to human rights and through its solid support for this Government—as well as previous ones—when intervening on the world stage through the ILO and many other bodies, whether it is working to help improve the conditions of workers in Bangladeshi factories, people in prison or the like. I hope the Government will be able to commit to continuing our help for the trade union movement's operations and fully utilise them in driving forward our foreign policy.

Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde (Lab): My Lords, the gracious Speech had just one paragraph on defence—

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): My Lords, it is time for the Statement.

Terrorist Attacks

Statement

1.23 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House I shall now repeat a Statement delivered in the other place by my right honourable friend the Home Secretary.

“With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a Statement about the terrorist attacks we have seen since Parliament last sat. There has been no summer like it. When we rose seven weeks ago, we left this House in the wake of the worst terrorist attack our country had seen in over a decade, with Khalid Masood trying to strike at the heart of our democracy. He was foiled that day by one of our brave police officers. But tragically, that has proved to be the first of many attempts to bring terror and hate to our streets.

Two months later, a cowardly and devastating attack in Manchester left 22 people dead and 59 injured, after a suicide bomber targeted children at a concert in the Manchester Arena. On 3 June, a van was deliberately driven into pedestrians on London Bridge before three men got out of the vehicle and began stabbing people in nearby Borough Market. Eight people were killed and 48 injured. Then on Monday, almost exactly one year after Jo Cox was brutally murdered in Birstall, we woke up to the news of the return of far-right terror, when a man viciously drove into a group of Muslim worshippers in north London. One man, who had fallen ill before the attack, died and nine others were treated in hospital.

Westminster, the Manchester Arena, London Bridge and now Finsbury Park have left 36 innocent people dead and over 150 hospitalised—a tragic loss of innocent life. Last week, I met a mother and father who had lost their daughter in the vicious attacks on London Bridge. She had been stabbed while out celebrating her new

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]

job with a friend in Borough Market. Just under two weeks before, she planned to be at the arena in Manchester where Salman Abedi committed his heinous crimes but she decided not to use her ticket. She had come to London to enjoy a wonderful trip away—a once-in-a-lifetime experience—but instead it was the last trip she ever made. I know that everyone in this House will want to join me in expressing our sorrow for the pain her family will be feeling, and for all those families who have lost loved ones.

As well as passing on our thoughts and prayers for those victims who are still trying to recover from the trauma and tragedy of these events, I know that the House will want to join me in acknowledging the incredible efforts of our emergency services during this difficult period. The events of recent months serve to remind us of the bravery, professionalism and, above all, the incredible sacrifice made by those who work to keep us safe. As Home Secretary, there is nothing more saddening than standing before Parliament to deliver a Statement like this.

These acts of terrorism represent the very worst of humanity. They seek to spread fear, intolerance and hate. Countering this threat has always been a crucial part of the work of government. That is why we have introduced measures to disrupt the travel of foreign fighters and passed the Investigatory Powers Act, which gives the police and intelligence service more powers and the tools that they need to keep the public safe. That is why, just seven weeks ago, we legislated to strengthen our response to terrorist financing within the Criminal Finances Act. We have also protected overall police funding in real terms since 2015, increased counterterrorism budgets and funded an uplift in armed police officers. We are now in the process of recruiting more than 1,900 additional security and intelligence staff. The Channel programme, which offers voluntary tailored programmes of support to people assessed as at risk of radicalisation, has supported over 1,000 at-risk individuals since 2012. Following referrals from the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit, social media providers have removed 270,000 pieces of illegal terrorist material since February 2010.

But we are entering a new phase of global terrorism and many of the challenges we face are unprecedented. We now believe we are experiencing a new trend in the threat that we face. Between June 2013 and the Westminster Bridge attack in March this year, the security services foiled 13 plots linked to or inspired by Islamist extremists. But just since then, we have seen five plots prevented as well as three such Islamist extremist plots succeed—and, of course, the appalling attack at Finsbury Park earlier this week. We must do more. We must do more to defeat ideologies of hatred by turning people's minds from violence and towards pluralistic British values. We must make sure that these ideologies are not able to flourish in the first place. We must do more to force tech companies to take down terror-related content from their platforms, and do more to identify, challenge and stamp out the extremism that lurks in our communities.

That is why we will be setting up a commission for countering extremism. Just as the Labour Government in the 1970s set us on a course to tackle racial inequality

in this country by setting up the Commission for Racial Equality, we need to—and must—do more to tackle those extremists who seek to radicalise and weaponise young people in Britain today. Doing more also means asking difficult questions about what has gone wrong. In the light of the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, Britain's counterterrorism strategy will be reviewed to make sure that the police and the security services have what they need to keep us safe. In addition, there will be a review of the handling of the recent terror attacks to look at whether lessons can be learned about our approach. I am pleased to announce that David Anderson, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, will oversee it.

What we have witnessed in Manchester and in London are the depraved actions of murderers intended to tear our country apart, but each act of hate has been met with overwhelming defiance. In Borough Market recently, I saw stall holders dishing out olives into plastic pots, shoppers searching for delicious treats and tourists flicking through guide-books in the shadow of the Shard. Rather than being divided by recent violence, people seemed ever closer together. We should follow the example of the traders and the shoppers of Borough Market. What terrorists want is for us to fear and to turn on one another, but we will never give terrorists what they want. We will stand together, and we will make the point that terrorists will never win and that our values, our country and our unity will prevail. I commend this Statement to the House".

1.30 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement made by the Home Secretary in the other place earlier today. I first pay tribute to the emergency services, the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance service, the doctors, nurses and other staff in our NHS and the other security services which responded with courage, bravery and dedication to duty to preserve life and protect the public. We owe these heroes a great debt of gratitude, and we must never forget that.

I also send my thoughts and prayers and those of the whole House to the victims of these disgusting terrorist atrocities and to their families and friends. Since the Dissolution of the previous Parliament there have been atrocities in the Manchester Arena, at London Bridge and Borough Market and at Finsbury Park mosque. I support the police and the security services in investigating these matters fully and bringing the perpetrators to justice. I was pleased to see the bravery of PC Keith Palmer, who gave his life protecting us in this palace, recognised with a posthumous George Medal and that pensioner Bernard Kenny, who was stabbed trying to help Jo Cox MP when she was murdered in her constituency last June, also received the George Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours List announced on Saturday. There were countless other acts of bravery from the police, the other emergency services and members of the public dealing with the recent atrocities. Civilians stood up and stepped in to help those in need, and we are very grateful to them all. They are true examples of the British spirit and show why no terrorist will ever win.

I am not going to trade figures on the number of police officers and other specialists as they are all in the public view. There were more in 2010, and there are fewer in 2017. We welcome the increase in the number of police officers and other specialists to give the law enforcement agencies the staffing, powers and resourcing to do their job effectively, but we need to look carefully at what is being proposed as we must have sufficient resources in place to have people in post to be able to use the full range of powers to full effect. More powers without staffing and other resourcing is not going to be effective and will not provide the reassurance and protection our citizens need.

I very much welcome moves to get the internet companies to block and take down content promoting terrorism. Every effort must be made for further action in this area. It is just not acceptable. Swift action must be taken by these companies to take this content down. In her response, will the Minister refer to the following matters? What will be the role of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation before any new measures come before Parliament? Are the Government planning any review of the Prevent strategy? What reassurance is being given to the Muslim community and other faith communities? It has been reported that individuals involved in the Manchester and London Bridge terror attacks were reported to the authorities but were no longer thought to be an immediate threat. Can the Minister confirm that an urgent reassessment of any other individuals in this category is being done and that all intelligence that suggests any sort of activity, no matter who the perpetrators are, is constantly reviewed and assessed? We need to stand up to the terrorists wherever they come from—from Islamist terrorists to far-right extremists with their messages of death, destruction and hate. They are all murderers and vile preachers of hate.

Finally, I suggest to Members that if they have a spare moment they pop down to Borough Market. It is a wonderful part of the London Borough of Southwark and somewhere I have known for most of my life. I am a trustee of the United St Saviour's Charity, and I declare an interest. It owns a number of the affected properties around Borough Market and has been helping businesses get back on their feet over the past few weeks. Borough Market is a wonderful place and well worth a visit.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the Minister for repeating the Statement and express the condolences, thoughts and best wishes of those on these Benches to all those affected by these tragedies. I also express our thanks and admiration to the emergency services involved in each of these incidents, particularly the armed officers who had to take the difficult, split-second decision to shoot the suspected perpetrators of the London Bridge/Borough Market attack. Our thoughts should also be with those officers and their families.

I have four questions. Can the Minister confirm that central government funding for the police service is increasing in real terms? What account has been taken of the additional financial pressures on the police service, such as the apprenticeship levy, and the additional operational pressures, such as the public inquiry into covert policing and the post-event investigations into

these terrorist incidents? Is it not time to restore community policing, an invaluable source of community intelligence, after a cut of 20,000 police officers and 24,000 police support staff since 2010? Does the Minister agree with the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis that the Met is struggling because of a lack of resources? We welcome David Anderson's role in reviewing the handling of recent terror attacks. We welcome the idea of a commission for countering extremism, but we need to understand what that means. We also welcome an independent, evidence-based review of Britain's counterterrorism strategy, including an independent, evidence-based review of Prevent. Can the Minister give any more detail about the commission and can she confirm that the review will be independent and evidence-based?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, and the noble Lord, Lord Paddick, for the points they have made. The noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, made some very constructive points about police numbers and having the resources to meet the needs of the police in the work they do. Since 2010, police forces have increased the proportion of officers working at the front line and proved that you can continue to cut crime with a smaller, more agile workforce. This is going to be important as we consider capabilities going forward. Since 2015—I hope this goes to the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Paddick—we have protected overall police spending in real terms. We have increased the counterterrorism budget, and we have funded an uplift in the number of armed police officers. We have also increased the budget of our security services. There are more officers and staff involved in counterterrorism policing than ever before. However, the challenge is not simply about maintaining police numbers. As the nature and complexity of the threat changes, as noble Lords have said, so does the nature of the skills needed to tackle that threat. We have all seen that in recent weeks. We are in an ongoing and constructive dialogue with the police, including the Metropolitan Police. I do not recognise the cuts that the noble Lord talked about, but we will be talking to the police about ensuring that the right powers, capabilities and resources are in place.

The noble Lord talked about the David Anderson review, which will look into why the attacks took place and whether further work needs to be done. It will look into the historical aspect; not just things that have happened over the last few weeks but those in the past as well. Going forward, the review will also look at how we protect our citizens and whether any changes, including legislative changes, are needed as we proceed. But of course it is very early days. We want a thorough review, not a quick one, to make sure that we get things right in the future and respond to changing threats and those which might emerge.

The noble Lord also talked about the Manchester attacker and whether he was known. I hope noble Lords will understand that these matters are subject to police inquiry and that it would be wrong of me to start discussing any of these details, but of course the review will look into what the answers are. I think I have answered both noble Lords' questions, but I might have missed one from the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy. If he wants to repeat anything, I would be very happy to answer.

Lord Tebbit (Con): My Lords, I welcome most wholeheartedly what the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, said about the duty that falls on all of us to condemn all terrorists. I think today of course of my friends—Airey Neave, Ian Gow, Robert Bradford, Tony Berry—all Members of the other place and all murdered by the IRA. I hope the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, will have a quiet word in the ears of the leaders of his party who have such soft and comforting words for the IRA.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, as we deal with extremism in all its forms, we look not just at Islamist extremism but at far-right extremism. My noble friend is absolutely right to point out that we cannot forget the events in our recent history that caused such damage in our communities, both here and in Ireland.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, there is a tendency for party political polarisation to dominate this debate about handling terrorism. I wondered whether Ministers saw the interview with my noble friend Lady Chakrabarti during the middle of the election campaign in which she suggested that it might be possible to put together a team of privy counsellors, operating within the rules that apply to them and comprising members of all political parties, to sit down and evaluate these things and then make recommendations, bypassing the Government, directly to Parliament. There is a precedent for this from the late 1940s, when Mr Attlee did precisely that when dealing with national emergencies. Might Ministers consider what my noble friend said and perhaps come forward with some recommendations?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, it is fair to say, certainly in this House and in the other place, that when events such as this happen, there is broadly a consensus on how we should deal with things. We conflate matters sometimes when we talk about extremism, radicalisation or indeed terrorism and get mixed up in various activities, but the point is that we all seek the same ends. When the extremism commission starts its work, it will seek to get the views of Parliament on its recommendations. I think we all seek the same ends.

Baroness Verma (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend take back to all parliamentarians and to all those in positions of power that the rhetoric they use has a great impact on all our communities? In the past, we have seen divisive language from all sides, which needs to be looked at carefully if we are going to tackle this in a sensible, decent way. I suggest to my noble friend that she also takes back to her department that if we are to tackle extremist violence or extremist thought we need to start looking at it at a much earlier age and at how we can get into primary schools to create greater understanding between all communities.

1.45 pm

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My noble friend is absolutely right. We do not realise sometimes what far-reaching consequences the language that we use has. I am talking about all forms of prejudice or extremism et cetera. The noble Lord, Lord Singh, who is not in his place today, quite often talks in this House about religious literacy. We could all learn lessons

when it comes to the consequences of the points that we make and how they might affect broader society. I also agree with my noble friend about schools being involved in some of the early education of our children. Some of the events of recent weeks have frightened children, and they are being misinformed, which may lead to them being hostile towards each other at a young age. I certainly know that after the Manchester attack, Muslim children of friends of mine felt more reticent on their way to school. Of course, local communities and local schools have worked very hard to educate in this sphere, but education starts in those early years.

Baroness Hamwee (LD): My Lords, language is indeed important, and I wanted to ask about the use of the phrase “stamping out” extremism. It reflects understandable emotion, and indeed determination, but can stamping out achieve everything? Can the noble Baroness confirm that the extra staff referred to in the Statement will include psychologists, psychosocial experts and others who will work with no less rigour to approach the problem and address the issue? Secondly, I do not think that she replied, at any rate with any detail, to my noble friend’s question about the commission for countering extremism. Can she tell the House about the terms of reference and confirm, as I hope she will, that there will be wide consultation on those terms?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank the noble Baroness for that question. I did not give much detail about the commission for countering extremism because I simply do not have much detail at this point. Recommendations will certainly come back to Parliament. There was a question in the other place earlier about Parliament feeling outside what the commission does, but Parliament will be consulted and have its say on the commission’s recommendations. As for stamping out extremism, will we always stamp out all types of extremism? No, we will not, but what we can do as a society is collectively be intolerant of extremism in our society, and the cohesion of our communities will, to a great extent, achieve this.

Lord Marlesford (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend recognise that when countering terrorism, to preserve our national security, there will be occasions when there is a real and irreconcilable conflict with human rights? Will she assure the House that the Government will always carry out a careful and proportional assessment in order to decide in such cases whether counterterrorism or human rights should take precedence?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My noble friend brings up a very good point about the balance that we have in place to preserve our human rights—we will not be leaving the European Convention on Human Rights, as the manifesto makes clear—while also bringing perpetrators of terrorist atrocities to book. When we look forward, we will certainly consider whether we have got that balance right.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Affl): My Lords, I express my heartfelt condolences to those who perished in the terrorist attacks and all those who remain in a critical condition. I add my own tribute to the emergency services;

they showed tremendous courage in all its forms, and we are very grateful to them. I also take this opportunity to say that I knew PC Keith Palmer and I am delighted that he has received the honour that he has.

I want to make two points to the Minister. She mentioned looking at Channel, and my noble friend made a point about reviewing the Prevent programme. First, with regard to Channel, will the Minister write to me with details, or perhaps make them available in the Library, about the categories of Channel referrals? What are those categories and what are the criteria for referral?

Secondly, on the Prevent review, the Minister may not know that I was involved in Tony Blair's preventing terrorism task force. That group worked for maybe 18 months, as I have no doubt the commission for countering extremism will, but it resulted in the Prevent programme, which was very far from all the discussions that emanated from it. The Prevent programme in its entirety has been a failure because it missed out working in partnership with communities. What will the Minister do to ensure that the new commission will be broadly representative and contain men and women who do not just speak with the Government's tongue and make the Government feel comfortable?

My final point relates to division. It is time that this House and the other place rooted out from their language the term "Islamic terrorism". It is unforgivable. We are blessed with language to describe murder and mayhem, and we should stick to that. There has been an enormous amount of coming together of the community, but such language consistently divides and makes young people scared. I have four grandchildren, and my grandsons, who are four, five and nine, are scared to go to school because of such language, which alienates them from their friends. I urge the Government to reconsider the way in which they describe the utter brutality of terrorism, mayhem and murder.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I say to the noble Baroness that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary's Statement on Monday was met with great praise, certainly from the Muslim community in Greater Manchester, because it expressed the same horror with regard to what went on on Monday as to what had gone on in previous terrorist events. I think that might be what the noble Baroness was pointing to.

I cannot go through the criteria for Channel, but broadly speaking it is a voluntary mechanism that is in place for people who are at risk of radicalisation. It does not target people who are at risk of radicalisation; it tries to protect them. That is the most important aspect of the Prevent programme. There have been 1,000 Channel referrals over the last few years, 25% of which, by the way, related to the far right. I am confident that Prevent is working. We have disrupted people from going abroad to fight foreign fighters.

On the noble Baroness's point about language, I have already said this to my noble friend but I will reiterate it: we have to be careful about the language that we use. I can speak most of all for Manchester because I was there in the aftermath of the attack. The coming together of communities is our strength. There are things that government can do, but communities are very powerful bodies. I stood in Albert Square

while we had the vigil and I saw people from all races, creeds and colours. The Sikh community were giving out water to people, and there was a great sense of coming together. Afterwards I stood with Afzal Khan at the British Muslim Heritage Centre in Whalley Range. For me, that immediate response from communities and that coming together are among the most powerful things that have come out of the attacks in Manchester.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, should we not bear in mind that we are pandering to the terrorists the longer we delay the resumption of normal activities after a terrorist outrage? I condemn utterly what was done, but I believe that the suspension of ordinary activities was a little prolonged and gave them a victory.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: As my noble friend knows, terrorists do not like democracy. We certainly had to perform a balancing act in the wake of the terrorist attacks. We wanted to give respect to the dead, which was extremely important. The feeling in Manchester was visceral; these were little children who had been murdered. I thought that after the Manchester attack it was right to give a longer period of respect during the election period. However, we did not want democracy thwarted either, so after the third attack, which was so close to the general election, activity was resumed at a much quicker pace. I think we got the balance right, and I think the cross-party view was that we got the balance right.

Baroness Tonge (Non-Affl): My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. I share her horror at recent events and extend my condolences to the victims and their families. I wonder whether the House will join me in commending the imam of the Finsbury Park mosque, who held back a lot of very angry people who wished to attack the perpetrator of that event, and in doing so demonstrated the rule of law, which is surely one of the most noble of our British characteristics.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: From the noise that the noble Baroness is hearing she will be able to tell that the whole House agrees with her. I sometimes wonder whether the bravery of ordinary people is something that I would be capable of, and that imam was absolutely wonderful.

Lord Hutton of Furness (Lab): My Lords, will the commission for countering extremism, which she has referred to a number of times, exercise any statutory powers or functions?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I think the commission itself needs to explore the work that it is doing, and those deliberations are certainly in train. Whether legislation is needed as a result will become clear in due course.

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, at the Al Quds march in London on Sunday, Hezbollah flags were displayed in direct contravention of Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Separating Hezbollah into military and political wings is an untenable and artificial exercise. In fact, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands,

[LORD POLAK]

the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council designate Hezbollah in its entirety. In the wake of the awful deadly terror attacks against civilians in our country, is it not time that the UK demonstrated its commitment to combating extremism by joining our important allies in proscribing this terror group in its entirety?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My noble friend makes a very similar point to that made earlier by Robert Jenrick MP in the other place. Displaying those flags is certainly distasteful. It was probably designed to aggravate, and I certainly understand the concern that people might have when such things are thrust into the community. There is a big difference between a different political opinion or view, and putting that into action, and how far that has gone to this end. I certainly share my noble friend's view that that was certainly an attempt to goad people and make them feel very uncomfortable, particularly the family of Robert Jenrick, whose wife is Jewish.

Grenfell Tower

Statement

2 pm

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House I will now repeat a Statement made by my right honourable friend the Prime Minister in another place. The Statement is as follows:

"With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a Statement on the disaster at Grenfell Tower. I would like to start by apologising to the Leader of the Opposition for the short notice he has had of this Statement. I received an important update in the hour before making this Statement which I felt was essential to bring to the attention of the House this morning.

What happened in the early hours of last Wednesday morning was one of the most unimaginable tragedies our country has seen in many years. As of this morning, 79 people have been confirmed dead or listed as missing presumed dead, and with work ongoing to recover the bodies, sadly the death toll may rise further. We already know that many children are among the dead and that in some cases whole families perished, and that those who survived have lost loved ones, friends, neighbours and in many cases everything they own.

It should never have happened. In a few moments I will say how we are going to discover why it did. But, as I said yesterday, that initial failure was compounded by the fact that the support on the ground in the initial hours was not good enough. As Prime Minister, I have apologised for that second failure and taken responsibility for doing what we can to put it right.

On my first visit to north Kensington, I met with the emergency services. These extraordinary men and women put their lives on the line in an effort to save others, and my first responsibility was to check that they had all the resources they needed. I then visited Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, where I met some of the most seriously injured survivors—it was from

that experience that I decided we had to have an emergency fund. I also met a group of residents in Kensington, whom I then invited to Downing Street last weekend. I returned to Kensington again last night to hear directly from them about the progress that we are making.

What became clear very quickly was that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea could not cope, and it is right that the chief executive officer has now resigned. It is also why I set up the Grenfell Tower Recovery Taskforce, which I have been chairing personally.

But this is not just about the steps we take in the first few weeks; it is about a lasting commitment that we are making to supporting the families affected, long after the television cameras have gone. So let me set out in detail the steps that we are taking to support the victims and rehouse those who have lost their homes.

On Friday morning, the Government established a central command centre under the leadership of John Barradell, the chief executive of the City of London and former lead for London local government on resilience, and Eleanor Kelly, the chief executive of the London Borough of Southwark. On behalf of the whole House, I want to thank John and his team for all the work they are doing.

I also want to pay tribute to the fantastic response from London boroughs, including a number of chief executives who are currently working at the command centre, as well as the Mayor of London and leading figures from a number of councils from outside London. I want to thank the army of volunteers who stepped in to provide shelter, sustenance, comfort and practical support. And I want to thank my Communities Secretary and the Ministers for Housing and Planning, the Minister for London and the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service for the work they have been doing.

There are currently around 600 people on the site and in the immediate area who are working to provide support to the victims. The Westway sports centre has been transformed into an emergency community hub, staffed by 40 officials from six government departments. They are making sure that people have essential documents such as driving licences and passports that are fundamental to carrying on with their lives. They have also been joined by experts from organisations such as Transport for London, Citizens Advice and the Red Cross, and by NHS mental health staff, nurses, care managers and a GP. Anyone affected by the blaze can walk in and access the support they need, and so far there have been almost 700 visits to the centre. The centre's on-the-ground work is supplemented by the victim support unit, whose emergency helpline provides a single point of contact for victims who need to deal with multiple government services in the wake of the disaster.

Each family whose home was destroyed is receiving a £5,000 down payment from the emergency fund so that they can buy food, clothes and other essentials, and outreach workers are seeking to make sure that everyone gets the money they are entitled to. We are also paying all additional adults over 16 in these households £500 in cash. Other cash payments are being paid out by the council on a discretionary

basis—for example, to those whose home has been severely impacted but not permanently destroyed. As of midday on Wednesday we had made payments of over £700,000.

It is absolutely essential that people understand that they can keep the money they receive; these grants are not loans and they will not be expected to repay a single penny. Neither are they waiving any legal rights as a result of accepting this financial help. The payments will be disregarded for means-tested welfare payments, so no one in receipt of benefits will see their benefits cut if they accept emergency support.

I would also like to reassure people that we will not use this tragic incident as a reason to carry out immigration checks on those involved or on those providing vital information to identify victims or those assisting with the criminal investigation. We will make sure that all victims, irrespective of their immigration status, can access the services they need, including healthcare and accommodation.

In terms of local schools, Kensington Aldridge Academy, the school right next door to the tower, remains closed. However, all its pupils have already been accommodated at other schools in the area. The Department for Education is working with Ofqual to ensure that children who are sitting their GCSEs receive an appropriate exam dispensation, and specialist counselling has been offered to local schoolchildren and also to teachers affected by the fire.

Turning to rehousing, 151 homes were destroyed in the fire—most in the tower itself but also several in the immediate vicinity. All those who have lost their homes have been offered emergency hotel accommodation, and all will be offered rehousing within three weeks. Already, 164 suitable properties have been identified, and they are being checked and made ready for people to move into.

In the longer term, everyone whose home was destroyed will be guaranteed a new home on the same terms as the one they lost. Sixty-eight of those will be in a brand-new low-rise block that has just been built by Berkeley Homes. The developer has generously offered to turn over the entire block at cost price. Contractors are on site now, working 24/7 to speed up fit-out so that the first families can move in this summer.

Within the wider cordon area, many more homes were damaged by smoke or water or have lost gas, heating and hot water. Emergency hotel accommodation is available for anyone who does not want to remain in a damaged property, and over 100 hotel rooms have already been provided. We are also putting in place practical support to help accelerate necessary repairs and yesterday drew on expertise from the Army to assist with this.

Some survivors have said that they want to leave the local area, and we will of course support that and help them find a home elsewhere. But I want to be absolutely clear: nobody is being forced to move somewhere they do not want to go. If any honourable Member thinks they know of anyone being treated in this way, they should contact my office in Downing Street with the details.

As the scale of the tragedy became clear, we quickly decided that there had to be an independent public inquiry. As I said to the House yesterday, it will be

chaired by a judge to get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible, and to provide justice for the victims and their families, who suffered so terribly. All those with an interest, including survivors and victims' families, will be consulted about the terms of reference, and we will pay for legal representation for those affected.

Listening to survivors last night, it also became clear that they want support to come together as a group to have their voices heard, and the Government will play our part in helping them to do so. For too long, residents have been overlooked and ignored. We will ensure that they are involved in every step of this process. No stone will be left unturned in this inquiry and, for any guilty parties, there will be nowhere to hide.

I am also clear that we cannot wait for ages to learn the immediate lessons, and so I expect that the chair of the inquiry will want to produce an interim report as early as possible.

I know that many others living in tall residential buildings will have concerns about their safety after what happened at Grenfell. All social landlords have been instructed to carry out additional fire safety checks on tower blocks and ensure that the appropriate safety and response measures are in place. This is being done in co-operation with local fire and rescue services. We have also taken steps to make private landlords aware and have made our checking facilities available to them for free.

The House should, of course, be careful on speculating what caused this fire, but as a precaution the Government have arranged to test cladding in all relevant tower blocks. Shortly before I came to the Chamber, I was informed that a number of these tests have come back as combustible. The relevant local authorities and local fire services have been informed and, as I speak, they are taking all possible steps to ensure buildings are safe and to inform affected residents. Immediately after this Statement, the Department for Communities and Local Government will contact any MPs whose constituents are affected, and the Communities Secretary will provide a further update later today.

We can test over 100 buildings a day, and the results come within hours. I urge any landlord who owns a building of this kind to send samples for testing as soon as possible. Any results will be communicated immediately to local authorities and local fire services. Landlords have a legal obligation to provide safe buildings and, where they cannot do that, we expect alternative accommodation to be provided. We cannot and will not ask people to live in unsafe homes.

It is clear that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was not able to cope with the scale of the tragedy, so we will also develop a new strategy for resilience in major disasters, which could include a new civil disaster response taskforce that can help at times of emergency.

Finally, we must learn some of the lessons of this and previous disasters where bereaved families have not had the support they need. We will introduce an independent public advocate for public disasters, a strong independent voice for victims and on behalf of bereaved families, supporting them at public inquests and inquiries.

[BARONESS EVANS OF BOWES PARK]

In the past week, a lot of remarkable people have gone above and beyond to help deal with the fire and its aftermath. First and foremost, of course, are the incredible men and women of the emergency services who did so much to save so many lives. I cannot imagine the kind of bravery it takes to run into a burning building and head upstairs when any normal person would head for the exits. But we have also seen sterling work from people across the public sector—teachers, nurses, staff from various local authorities and civil servants—who are doing all they can to help. We have seen incredible acts of generosity from private businesses, and we have seen the people of this great city and this great country stepping up to help in any way they can, by donating money, clothes, toys and food, volunteering their time, and so much more.

But, above all, I want to pay tribute to the people of Kensington, who have opened their hearts and homes to people affected by the fire, coming together and showing what a real community looks like. The selfless actions of local people and the courage and resilience of the survivors should give us all pause for thought.

Right now, our focus is on supporting the victims, finding homes for those made homeless and making sure this country's housing stock is as safe as possible. But as we move forwards, so we must also recognise that for too long in our country, under Governments of both colours, we simply have not given enough attention to social housing. That itself is actually a symptom of an even more fundamental issue.

It should not take a disaster of this kind for us to remember that there are people in Britain today living lives that are so far removed from those that many here in Westminster enjoy—that in this tower, just a few miles from the Houses of Parliament, and in the heart of our great city, people live a fundamentally different life, do not feel the state works for them and are therefore mistrustful of it. So, long after the TV cameras have gone and the world has moved on, let the legacy of this awful tragedy be that we resolve never to forget these people and instead gear our policies and thinking towards making their lives better and bringing them into the political process. It is our job as a Government, and I believe as a Parliament, to show we are listening and that we will stand up for them. That is what I am determined we should do. I commend this Statement to the House”.

That concludes the Statement.

2.14 pm

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for repeating this very comprehensive Statement, with lots of information in there. She will understand that it also begs a number of questions, and I hope that she will be able to answer them today—but, if she is not, I shall be happy for her to write to me.

First, it is right that we recognise the almost unspeakable horror of the fire in which so many have lost lives, friends, family, their homes and all their possessions; it is a tragedy on an almost unimaginable scale. If you listen to those who are affected, it is clear that it is never going to leave them; it will stay with

them for the rest of their lives. The noble Baroness is quite right to say that the support is not just for today or tomorrow—it is long-term support that we are talking about.

I also place on record our huge gratitude to the emergency services—the medical staff, police and, particularly, the fire and rescue services, which went above and beyond the call of duty. I understand from those who have seen and heard the recordings from the fire engines when they arrived at the fire, they could not believe what they were going to. They were saying, “How in the something or other are we ever going to get into that building to rescue people?”. Those were the comments that they were making as they arrived. There was no structural engineer on site at that point, so they had no way of knowing whether it was safe to go into that building or not—but they went in. Many years ago, I did some fire service training as a fire authority member, and I have done a mock-up wearing breathing apparatus. That was in safe conditions, but I know something of how terrifying it must be for those who arrive at such a scene, and the bravery of those men and women who attended the fire. No words can express how grateful we and others are to them.

The response from the local community and the public was almost overwhelming, such was the scale of the horror of what they witnessed. However, as the noble Baroness has said, the response from the local council was nothing short of appalling and a disaster. I pay tribute to the other London boroughs which do not have the wealth or resources or the financial reserves of Kensington and Chelsea but which went to the aid and assistance of people outside their borough to do what they could to help—and they seemed better able to provide some of the support that was needed. The noble Baroness made the point that the council was certainly not up to responding to residents' needs.

I welcome the inquiry, which is a step forward. The noble Baroness is right to say that there should be an interim report—one hopes by the summer—but, as well as the other issues that it addresses, can it address the wider issues of accountability? The management of that block was outsourced to a private company, which does not seem—and this will be borne out by the inquiry—to have had any direct relationship with the residents so that the residents could force it to respond or have any accountability process. That should be looked at as part of the wider issues.

I note in the Queen's Speech that the Government have taken up the proposal from my noble friend Lord Wills of a public advocate. It would seem that the quicker we can have somebody in place to advise those who want to play a role and be involved in the inquiry, the better. I hope that we can look at that ASAP.

Clearly, this is a fast-moving situation, with new information and details emerging all the time. I appreciate that government and local councils want to reassure people, but we can reassure people only if they are genuinely safe; people cannot be reassured unless the necessary checks have been undertaken and any changes have been made so that people are safe. Shortly after the Prime Minister gave her Statement to the House of Commons, we heard the alarming news that, when in

the Statement today she mentioned that a “number” of high-rise tower blocks were affected, up to 600 in England alone could have combustible cladding installed. Can the noble Baroness confirm that the figure of around 600 is correct? If it is, when did that figure become known to the Government? What action are the Government taking? If there are 600 blocks of flats in England alone in that situation, the scale of the work to be done is just enormous. The Downing Street spokeswoman said earlier today that:

“Obviously nobody will be living in buildings that are unsafe. They will be rehoused if they need to be and landlords will be asked to provide alternative accommodation where that’s possible”.

If 600 blocks are affected, I am not sure that the checks can be done as quickly as that. If 100 blocks can be checked today, it will still be quite a long time before all blocks are checked and any work is undertaken. If those people are to be rehoused, it will be more than a million people. There must be some contingency plans for the Government to work with local councils on that, because this clearly seems to be beyond the scale of most local authorities’ ability to cope. Can the noble Baroness confirm whether that figure is correct, when the Government knew and what action is being taken?

I have a couple of questions on resources for local authorities. This is clearly going to be an expensive business—rightly so—for local authorities to undertake properly, so are local authorities guaranteed the resources to carry out any necessary additional checks? What conversations or discussions have there been between central government and the private companies that have supplied and fitted such cladding on to high-rise blocks? There is an issue about whether all housing providers have been alerted by those companies that fitted such cladding. The inquiry is welcome, but the noble Baroness is right to say that we do not have to wait to take action. After the previous fire that we saw in 2009, I gather that the coroner’s recommendations were made in 2013 to the Department for Communities and Local Government about retrofitting sprinklers—those recommendations could be acted on now. We would be grateful if the noble Baroness could respond on that.

When the Prime Minister was asked in the House of Commons about whether the buildings were compliant with building regulations, she said that the police and fire services were investigating and would report in 24 hours. That is a reasonable response in terms of the buildings that we are talking about, but the legal position regarding that kind of cladding on high-rise buildings is not a matter for the fire and rescue service or the police to investigate; the Government must know whether or not the building regulations allow it. Can the noble Baroness respond immediately on that? I cannot see why we have to wait 24 hours for a statement from the fire and rescue services, because whether the building regulations do or do not allow it should be a matter of fact. In terms of this particular block, there were building regulations inspections. Were faults found during those inspections and, if they were, was action taken to remedy the faults? It is clear that there were complaints beforehand.

I have one final point: a Minister commented to me a while ago regarding deregulation that the Government’s policy was that you had to have three regulations out

before you could bring another one in. We all know that society does not like to be overregulated—nobody wants unnecessary red tape—but that seems to not look at the value of regulation; it is a numerical chance exercise. Can the noble Baroness confirm whether that is the case? I would be delighted if it was not, but if that is still government policy, surely it should be reviewed. We should regard regulations on their merit, not on the number of regulations, which is completely irrelevant in terms of safety for society.

The Statement is comprehensive and welcome. As times goes on, there will be some challenging, difficult and perhaps uncomfortable truths to be faced about how society operates and how it treats poorer people, particularly with regard to housing. This is a disaster beyond anything we could have ever contemplated. If lessons are not learned from this, we will be doing the public an enormous disservice.

Lord Newby (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness the Leader of the House for repeating the extremely comprehensive Statement. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to all those who lost their lives in the tragedy; our sympathies are, of course, with all those residents who will have to rebuild their lives after such a horrific event and with the families of those affected. I also put on record again the huge debt of gratitude that we owe to those in the fire service and all the emergency services who worked tirelessly to rescue residents and support families in the immediate circumstances of the fire, and in the almost as bad circumstances of having to sift through the building day after day to see what they could find in the wreckage.

There was a huge gulf in the response to this tragedy between the public and the Government. The public acted immediately and with great generosity. Government, both national and local, acted slowly and, initially at least, without the same energy or generosity. It took the Government 48 hours to establish a central command centre, for example, and the borough council seemed unprepared and overwhelmed. If this had been a terrorist attack, the response would have been far more effective—we saw that in London only a few days ago. Things that have, for example, taken 48 hours in this case, would, in the case of a terrorist attack, be in place within 48 minutes. There was clearly a failure of emergency planning for this kind of incident, which we do not see for terrorist attacks, for which emergency planning is clearly extremely good. So I ask the Government: what immediate steps are being taken to ensure that such a failure will not be replicated in any future non-terrorist incident?

The Government say that they welcome—and indeed precipitated—the resignation of the chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea council. But what about the leader of the council? It was a political decision to stockpile huge cash reserves while apparently skimping on safety measures. Will the Government now be asking him to resign also?

We welcome the public inquiry that has been announced by the Prime Minister. We must obviously ask a raft of difficult questions, including why the fire spread so quickly and why the lessons of the past seem not to have been learned, but there are obvious concerns

[LORD NEWBY]

about how long such an inquiry might last. History is not very encouraging in this respect. Can the Leader of the House give any further assurances in terms of both the speed with which any interim recommendations might be produced and how we can ensure that the full inquiry does not drag on for years?

The Statement says that a number of tests already carried out have shown other blocks to be clad in combustible materials, and the Government claim that all local authorities and fire services are now taking all possible steps to ensure buildings are safe. Given that some—indeed many—of these steps will be costly, can the Government give an assurance today that they will not be delayed by any shortage of funding? In the case of such buildings which are privately owned, what steps beyond exhortation will the Government take to ensure that the owners fulfil their legal obligations to provide safe buildings?

It is clear that, when the tests on all these buildings are complete, there will be a need for large-scale remedial action. If there are 600 blocks, there will be a vast amount of work that needs doing quickly. This can be undertaken only by skilled workers in the construction sector. Given that there is already a shortage of such skills, particularly in London, and that 50% of the construction workforce in London is from the EU, can the noble Baroness give an assurance that, as the Brexit talks proceed, every encouragement will be given to such workers to continue to come to London, as any major labour shortage in this area could be literally a matter of life and death?

There are a number of issues in the Statement that could legitimately give rise to anger. But what got to me was the Prime Minister's peroration. She said:

"It should not take a disaster of this kind for us to remember that there are people in Britain today living lives that are so far removed from those that many here in Westminster enjoy";

and she went on,

"let the legacy of this awful tragedy be that we resolve never to forget these people and instead to gear our policies and our thinking towards making their lives better and bringing them into the political process. It is our job as a Government ... to show we are listening and that we will stand up for them".

This is a leader of a party who has just stood on an election manifesto to cut spending in schools by 7% and impose big further cuts in welfare payments and local government expenditure. This hypocrisy makes me very angry. Will the noble Baroness the Leader of the House suggest to the Prime Minister that if she really wishes to stand up for people such as the tenants of Grenfell Tower, she should start to adopt policies which follow her words?

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I express my thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and the noble Lord, Lord Newby, for their comments and contributions today. As we have all recognised, this has been one of the most unimaginable tragedies that we have seen in many years. I once again reiterate that our thoughts at this time are very much with the families and all those affected. I reassure everyone that the Government's focus is on doing everything possible to help those affected.

Before I respond to some of the points the noble Lords have made, in the light of the tragic events, my noble friend Lord Bourne will provide time to update Peers on the events and the Government's response. He will host an all-Peers briefing session on Monday 26 June at 3 pm in Room 10A. As the noble Baroness said, given that things are changing regularly, we hope that the comments of my noble friend Lord Bourne on the latest issues will be a very useful update for noble Lords.

I will try to answer as many questions as I can but I shall read noble Lords' comments, and I apologise if I do not respond to everything at this point. I will try to follow up where I can afterwards. Both the noble Baroness and the noble Lord asked about the public inquiry. I reassure everyone that we want to leave no stone unturned, which is why we have ordered a public, judge-led inquiry. Draft terms of reference have been shared with the Lord Chief Justice and discussions about a potential chair are ongoing. We hope to have a confirmed appointment very shortly. I also reassure noble Lords that the families of victims and other interested parties will be consulted on the terms of reference, as it is essential that their voices are heard, and, as the noble Baroness rightly said, that the whole range of issues that need to be investigated are included in this inquiry.

The noble Baroness asked about the 600 figure, which I should clarify. We think that there may be around 600 buildings which have cladding. That is not to say that is combustible cladding but we think that about 600 buildings have cladding. Landlords are now examining these to see which have aluminium composite material which may need to be tested. Testing will reveal how many have the wrong type of cladding. It is important also to stress that aluminium composite material cladding itself is not dangerous, but it is important that the right type is used. Not all those 600 buildings may have an issue; that is the range of buildings which may need to be looked at. I can also confirm to the noble Lord that the testing being undertaken is free. The Government are providing the funding for that, so funding should not get in the way of testing. Indeed, we are urging all landlords to make sure that they send in samples as quickly as possible. The labs can test about 100 a day and results can be turned around very quickly so we can get very quick responses. Indeed, Camden council announced this morning or this afternoon that it needs to investigate one of its buildings. It has acted very quickly on the information it has received. Therefore, we very much hope that everyone will send their samples in and we will be able to take action as quickly as possible.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith, asked about the building regulations. Cladding using a composite aluminium panel with a polyethylene core would be non-compliant under current building regulations, as this material should not be used as cladding on buildings over 18 metres in height. It is also important to note that tests are ongoing to identify the exact causes of the fire, but we will, of course, take all steps necessary to prevent this happening again. The cost of dealing with the cladding on buildings will, of course, vary depending on the buildings. It is the landlord's

responsibility to ensure that people are safe but cost considerations should not, and cannot, get in the way of that, so we will look at how we can provide support. We will also obviously work with local authorities where they identify issues to ensure that they have the resources they need to deal with the issues that they may find.

The noble Lord, Lord Newby, commented on the initial response. The Prime Minister has been very clear that we absolutely accept that the initial support for families was simply not good enough. She has apologised and I do so again on behalf of the Government. In terms of actions going forward, one of the actions that we will take is to set up a new civil disaster response task force. That will be part of our procedures going forward, so that we can try to ensure that the suffering people experienced after the event because the response was not good enough does not occur again.

2.35 pm

Lord Soley (Lab): My Lords, I knew this block of flats well as it was part of a complex—about six or eight of them—which was included in the Hammersmith area which I represented for many years. I often went into Grenfell Tower when campaigning for elections. It is important to say that those flats were very spacious inside and were not at all unpopular with residents if—this was the crucial bit—they were managed well. There are questions about management on which my noble friend and others have touched. That is a matter for the inquiry and I do not wish to second-guess it. However—this is very important—my understanding from many people who have made comments, such as residents and organisations or individuals representing residents in that block, is that they warned of a fire risk. If residents or residents' associations or representatives express concern about fire safety, that should be dealt with as a matter of urgency and immediately, whatever the other concerns. It is far too serious to be put to one side to be looked at later. Sadly, in this context, I note that the chief executive has resigned. I guess that is probably the right thing to do. Having heard the leader of the council's comments on television soon after the event, I felt that he was out of his depth and did not understand the extreme nature of the horror that had overtaken that block of flats. In those circumstances, I also think that he should consider his position.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I disagree with nothing that the noble Lord has said. As I have said, we want the inquiry to look at all elements of this tragedy to make sure that such things do not happen again. The noble Lord is absolutely right: we have heard a lot of reports of the residents' groups complaining and putting forward their points of view about their concerns and not being listened to. That is why it is crucial that we get the inquiry set up, that it is judge led and that the voices of families and victims are heard so that we can make sure this does not happen again. I know that is of no comfort to the families who have lost their lives in this but we will have to learn these lessons and make sure that we follow through.

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, as my noble friend outlined, 151 homes have been destroyed. However, has an accurate list been compiled of all the residents of the block? My noble friend outlined that homes will be provided to people on the same terms as the ones they had. Has a clear communication been given that for residents who may have resided in the block without a tenancy agreement, or with a tenancy agreement not authorised by the landlord, that does not matter one jot when it comes to rehousing people and considering the effects of this incident on them? I welcome the Government's response that the immigration status of anybody in the building is utterly irrelevant to their receiving compensation. Will my noble friend the Leader of the House ask my noble friend Lady Williams to consider earnestly what the Home Office policy will be? Some people may end up in front of Home Office decision-makers. What will be the Government's policy in relation to any victims who have irregular immigration status?

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I am very happy to reiterate that the Government will not use this tragic incident as a reason to carry out immigration checks on those involved and those providing vital information to identify victims. I also reassure the House that we will make sure that all victims, irrespective of their immigration status, will be able to access the services they need, including accommodation and healthcare.

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, I was a councillor in an adjoining ward of Golborne and I am a long-term resident in the area. The Government's response at last appears to be closer to the scale of the tragedy. How can one justify a council which has given priority to keeping council tax down and which has placed so much emphasis on outsourcing what are in effect its responsibilities in management and housing generally? On visas, will the funeral visas be extended to family members who want to come to this country to help those who have been affected? Finally, did I hear the Leader correctly when she said that she agreed with my noble friend Lord Soley that the council leader should consider his position?

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I said that I agreed with much of what the noble Lord, Lord Soley said. It is not for me to make those decisions, but we have all accepted that the response was not good enough, so I think everyone is looking at themselves to see what we can do better in the future. On the noble Lord's questions about visas, my understanding is—I might need to write to confirm this—that a number of family members in cases where their loved ones and relatives have been involved have already been able to come over. I do not know the exact numbers, but we are already working hard to ensure that at this awful time family members can come over to be with their loved ones.

Baroness Pinnock (LD): My Lords, accountability is very important in political life to ensure that the people we take decisions for trust those of us who represent them. The noble Baroness has so far failed to respond to direct questions from my noble friend Lord Newby and the noble Lord, Lord Soley, about the position of the leader of Kensington Borough Council.

[BARONESS PINNOCK]

This was a council-owned building, the council had invested in renovating it, and it went up in flames, destroying the lives of, so far, 79 people. For accountability to be real, should not the leader of the council resign?

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: As the Prime Minister said in her Statement, we believe that it is right that the chief executive resigned because we have acknowledged all along that there has not been good enough support for the families. As I have also said, the judge-led inquiry will allow us to look at the broader circumstances leading up to and surrounding the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower so that all lessons can be learned by everyone involved.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I welcome the Statement and the eventual comprehensive response, and I particularly welcome the speech given by the noble Baroness, the Leader of the Opposition, which was especially powerful and helpful. Having been with voluntary groups at the Grenfell Tower during the day following the fire, I have two questions. First, one of the fire officers we were talking to said, “This is the third once-in-a-generation event in a few weeks”. The number of emergency service people, who for the third time in a very few weeks put their lives on the line and found themselves in a situation of the most absolute horror, seeking to save the victims who were caught in the fire as well as in the previous terrorist incidents, is much higher than would normally be expected. Can the Leader of the House confirm that there will be no budgetary constraints on the emergency services in providing support for those who have been involved in taking these huge risks and that those services will be adequately funded above and beyond their normal provision in supporting those who may need extra support after such a traumatic period? Secondly, one of the other notable things is that around the site of the fire on the following day the faith communities—there is reference in the Statement to volunteers—were working together in a way that completely gave the lie to the divisions that the terrorist attacks had sought to create. This was the most powerful visual image of unity, and of unity around the suffering. Would she agree that those communities also merit mention and commendation?

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I am happy to agree with the comments of the most reverend Primate. We also saw a similar coming together of community after the Finsbury Park mosque incident, so I am very happy to endorse everything he said. With regard to the emergency services, again, I think we have all agreed about the emergency services and the bravery of the fire services—the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, spoke very well about that. We saw in their response that they were able to act very quickly and to do everything within their power to save as many people as possible. Of course, we commend all the incredible work that they do.

Lord Bird (CB): Is it possible to take into account that there were a lot of people to put the fire out, but where were the people to stop the fire from happening? If you know that particular part of London—Notting Hill and Latimer Road—you will know that over the

last 30 or 40 years the council has shifted and ethnically cleansed other parts of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, moving them into an area that has become pretty troubled. I want to know what we are going to do about councils that have very rich parts of their borough but do not know how to deal with the poor parts. This has been going on for a considerable period of time. By the way, I speak as an ex-employee of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: Obviously, a lot of work is going on within government to learn the lessons. We are focused on dealing with the immediate aftermath, but as I have also said, we want the inquiry to look at the broader circumstances that led up to the tragic fire, and we will work across government to make sure that we address the issues, whatever they may be, to make sure that this does not happen again.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, surely the most disturbing aspect of this is that people forecast a terrible fire. Should we not conduct some sort of survey of those living in tower blocks around the country? We are having the cladding examined, but should we not try to find out whether in other parts of the country people living in similar tower blocks have warned the local authorities of their fears? This was an unspeakable disaster, but for another one to happen would be totally unforgivable.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I am sure that local authorities are considering the sorts of issues that my noble friend has mentioned. As I said, what is most important is that we get the cladding checked on these buildings to make sure that we can truly identify where there may be issues and act quickly. That is why we have set up these testing centres, why we are turning round results as quickly as possible, and why we were very pleased, for instance, to see Camden’s very swift and impressive response once it discovered an issue with one of its blocks.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): Going back to the inquiry, quantity surveyors, the architects, the main contractors, the subcontractors, the building control officers and the planning officers of the council will all be asked many questions. Will their answers all appear in the interim report and will the findings of the inquiry at that stage also be in the interim report? In particular, I ask that the specifications originally set by the architect and approved, we have to assume, by the building control officers and the fire authorities, will be in the appendices of the interim report so that we can all see them, along with all the approval documentation and survey reports by all the organisations involved. Some of us will be more interested in seeing what is in those documents than reading the report itself, because we will probably want to make up our own mind.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: Obviously, it will be for the head of the inquiry to decide exactly how they want to conduct the inquiry. However, as I have said, we want to ensure that voices are heard and that the terms of reference of the inquiry cover all the issues that, rightly, families, victims and others want to see. I therefore assume that the judge who is appointed will

be taking soundings and will have views on the terms of reference. I cannot speak for them about what the interim report will include but I think we are all very conscious of the fact that we want this to be done speedily and that we expect an interim report.

Lord Shutt of Greetland (LD): My Lords, will the announced public inquiry be conducted under the full rigour of the Inquiries Act 2005? We have this Act; it should be used.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: As I said, we want to leave no stone unturned, and therefore this will be a full, independent, judge-led inquiry.

Lord Hayward (Con): Perhaps I may follow on from the questions in relation to the public inquiry and the reference that has just been made to the legislation. Can we please ensure that when people give evidence, they do so in full and do not hide behind the fact that, if they answer certain questions, they might incriminate themselves, which could result in a criminal prosecution? People expect a public inquiry to be full and public, not partially full and partially in public.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: As I hope I have made clear to noble Lords, we want a judge-led inquiry. It will be for the person appointed to lead the inquiry and to determine how it works. However, as we have said, we want to make sure that all voices are heard, and I am sure that whoever leads the inquiry will refer to this debate with interest and take account of noble Lords' comments.

Baroness Andrews (Lab): Can the noble Baroness confirm that the Fire Brigades Union asked the Department for Communities and Local Government to update Part B of the building regulations—the fire safety regulations—some time ago and that this has not been done? Especially as she confirmed the element of illegality of certain types of cladding, does she know whether the request was to look in any way at the nature of cladding? Can she also take the opportunity to answer the question asked by my noble friend the Leader of the Opposition about the Government's future attitude to regulation? It is significant that the Prime Minister says in the Statement that the state has not worked for many people. I suggest that the reason for that is that in recent years it has been so whittled away in respect of important and defensible regulations, not least in relation to planning and housing.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I am afraid that I will have to write to the noble Baroness because I do not know the answer to her question about the fire union's request. I apologise but I will write to her.

Lord Adebawale (CB): Having listened to the Statement and the comments from the House, I cannot help thinking, as a former housing officer, that this dreadful tragedy is a terrible episode in a systemic failure. I recognise that the Government are making every effort to respond to the tragedy—albeit too late—but I wonder whether the Minister might respond to the systemic issues. There is evidence that a letter was sent to the Housing Minister by the APPG—which consists

of experts who know about fire safety in buildings—asking for the regulations to be updated. That advice and request should have been responded to some time ago and it would be a shame if a public inquiry stopped it being responded to now. Equally, the concerns that the Grenfell Tower residents sent to their landlord appear to have been ignored, and it would be a shame if a public inquiry stopped those concerns too being responded to immediately. Similarly, the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Bird, about ethnic cleansing cannot be ignored. I cannot help but notice that the skin colour of a number of the people affected by the tragedy happens to be nearer the shade of my skin than that of others. If we are to respond to the systemic issues of this tragedy as well as the episodic ones, we have to look at the allocations policy in local government housing, at the design of social housing and at the paucity of policy leadership in this area. Perhaps the Minister would care to respond to that.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I can certainly reassure the noble Lord that, although the findings of the public inquiry will of course feed into the work that we are doing, that work will not stop, and we are continuing to work on simplifying the guidance on the fire safety building regulations. Therefore, there will not be a stop on the action but the public inquiry will of course play an important part in helping us to ensure that we have a suitable response across all the issues that have led to this tragic accident.

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords—

Lord Tugendhat (Con): My Lords, besides the issues of the public inquiry, it will also be necessary to look at the structure of local government taxation. Those of us who live in the middle of London—I live in the City of Westminster, not in the royal borough—are acutely aware of the very low differential between the taxes paid by those of us who live in desirable properties in desirable areas and the amount paid by people who live in less desirable properties in less desirable areas. There really ought to be a bigger bandwidth between the two.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: I thank my noble friend for those comments. The point he makes comes somewhat outside what I can say today, but the Minister for the department is here and has, I am sure, listened with interest.

Queen's Speech

Debate (2nd Day) (Continued)

2.55 pm

Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde (Lab): My Lords, in returning to the debate on the gracious Speech, I apologise to the House for my discourtesy in attempting to speak earlier. I have apologised to the Minister concerned—the noble Baroness, Lady Williams. I was not aware that the House would be going straight into the Statement but I feel that I should apologise.

[BARONESS DEAN OF THORNTON-LE-FYLDE]

The gracious Speech had one paragraph on defence. It came two-thirds of the way through the Speech and I am not sure that that creates a feeling of priority for what is a very important issue. This morning the Minister put some flesh on the bones of that paragraph and talked about areas that would be improved for Armed Forces personnel, as well as matters relating to compensation and other areas. While referring to that, I welcome the Minister back to his portfolio. We are delighted to see him there in the new but very insecure Government. I do not know how long he will be sitting in that seat but it is good to see him there.

That paragraph referred specifically to two points. One was the 2% contribution to NATO and the other was the Armed Forces covenant. As mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, the 2% contribution to NATO has honed in on the defence debate, and I agree with people who say that it can be a distraction. However, we need to remind ourselves that the contribution should be at least 2%, and from my point of view it should certainly remain at that level. Depending on what figures you look at, the Treasury said that in 2015-16 it spent 1.9%, but many of us would say that that includes war pensions and items that should not be included, which means that really the figure came nowhere near 1.9%. The 2% contribution is crucial.

In general terms, I think we all accept that we live in a very insecure world. If anything has proved that over the last few weeks, it has been the terrorist attacks. If we think that only our internal security services can protect us from that insecurity, we are misleading ourselves. The role of our Armed Forces and our defence overall are crucial. I suggest that defence lies not just in the capability contained in the hardware and computer software; crucially, it also lies in our service personnel. They are a crucial element in all this, and certainly the Armed Forces covenant is central to it.

I agreed with the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, when he talked about personnel. I was delighted to hear what he had to say because I do not think that we spend sufficient time on personnel issues in the defence area. We talk more about the hardware, and that is important, but our service personnel are key. We have the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body, which a long time ago I was honoured to chair. Its recent reports, the last one in particular, talked about low morale. The Armed Forces have been limited to a 1% maximum pay increase over the past years, and yet the review body is supposed to be independent.

The Minister talked about recruitment and retention. On recruitment, we have been losing more people than we have been able to recruit in recent times. That is a danger. We need steady recruitment and we need to make sure that the money for young men and women is at the level that has been agreed. On retention, we were told last week that since the Brexit vote there has been something like a 96% drop in the number of nurses coming into our health service. If we continue with the austerity measures relating to personnel, recruitment and retention will become even more difficult.

It is difficult, too, for defence personnel because, unlike nurses in the health service, teachers, doctors and those in other professional services, they cannot

demonstrate down Whitehall. They cannot say, "We want this 1% to go". They do not have representation as other sectors do, other than the reports of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body. It is incumbent on the Government to look at this and to accept that one possible reason for the outcome of the general election was that the public think austerity has gone too far where people are concerned. We need to review it.

In the short time I have, I should like to ask the Minister to comment on a number of matters. Will he agree that the Government will look at the 1% and give back independence to the role of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body so it can carry out an independent review annually and make recommendations to the Government? Will the Minister comment on the view that is now generally held—not just by Members in this Chamber but by those outside, among our suppliers, our Armed Forces and their officers—that the defence capability we now have in this country is substantially weaker in conventional weapons than it was 10 years ago, and significantly less than at the time of the Robertson defence review in 1997?

Will the Minister also comment on a story that is going round? Is it correct that a capability expenditure initiative is being carried out by the Permanent Under-Secretary at the MoD and that, following its conclusion, the Secretary of State will hold a further 90-day review on defence spending? Against that background, will the Government confirm the Conservative manifesto commitment that 0.5% above inflation will be paid each year until 2022—assuming that this Government are still in power then—and that they will not use that confirmation to seek cuts elsewhere in defence spending?

Reference has been made in our debate to terrorist events—we have just heard a Statement from the Minister—and the response of our emergency services, which has been above and beyond the call of duty. That has rightly been expressed, time after time, by most people. Our young men and women in the role of defence face equal danger, day in and day out, albeit in a different way. They put their lives on the line, as we have seen time after time. If the Government were to review the issue of 1% of defence expenditure, they would find no opposition on these Benches. We support Trident and spending on defence, and we support the fact that defence needs more expenditure.

In the coming time, Brexit may occupy many hours of this Chamber and next door. However, we must not lose sight in those debates of the fact that defence is crucial for us and that we are, at the moment, probably not giving it the expenditure and support it deserves. If that continues, it will be to the cost of this country.

3.04 pm

Lord Chidgey (LD): My Lords, I shall focus briefly on three issues that fall within the compass of the debate. Before I do, I also pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, who formerly held this brief for the Government. The inclusive manner in which she engaged all sides of the House was much appreciated and, I believe, productive. I also welcome the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his new post and wish him well in following the path established by his predecessor.

Referring to previous contributions, the noble Earl, Lord Howe, set out a stark but realistic scenario of our world affairs and the UK Government's response in their efforts to protect and advance our interests. I echo the remarks of my noble friend Lord Purvis. The work of DfID and its staff in delivering international development projects around the world is universally respected. Partner agencies have told me time and again in my travels that DfID raises the bar and sets the standard that they aspire to reach and match.

The three issues I will raise are: first, the situation in Sudan and South Sudan; secondly, trade with Africa generally; and, finally, the sustainable development goals in the context of the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the London Commonwealth summit in 2018.

The noble Earl, Lord Howe, mentioned that British troops in South Sudan are providing humanitarian assistance. Reports last week over the latest developments in Sudan are deeply disturbing. For more than five years, armed conflict has continued between Sudanese government forces and armed rebels in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, despite a declared ceasefire. In the Nuba mountains, government forces and allied militias have attacked civilians in villages and through indiscriminate bombing. Human Rights Watch has reported numerous attacks resulting in the burning of crops, looting of food and displacement of people from farming areas. Civilian deaths mount, including those of children. Many are injured and civilian property has been destroyed.

Sudan's human rights record remains abysmal. Conflict and abuse continue in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and torture continue virtually unchecked. Freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression, which we take for granted, are severely restricted by security officials, as well as media freedoms. Sudan has also restricted religious freedoms and detained clerics.

The European Parliament has adopted an urgency resolution on Sudan calling on the EU to,

"impose targeted punitive sanctions against those responsible for continued war crimes and non-cooperation with the International Criminal Court".

The UN Security Council renewed UNAMID's mandate through June 2017 and extended the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei, despite Sudanese efforts to restrict or even end those operations. The latest news is that the UN Security Council is poised to slash the presence of UNAMID in Darfur, targeting reductions in police, military, and logistical and administrative personnel. The effect of this action will be to put millions of Darfuris at greater risk, intensifying insecurity and reducing humanitarian access.

As a member of both the European Union and the United Nations, the United Kingdom is obliged to implement any sanctions that either body chooses to impose. At present, the UK implements those sanctions through the use of EU legislation, under the European Communities Act 1972. It seems highly likely that the great repeal Bill will only freeze current sanctions; it will not update, amend or even lift them. In the meantime, 3 million Darfuris remain displaced from their homes and unable to return to Darfur, living in

miserable conditions. One would have thought that the violent deaths of more than half a million people might give the UN Security Council pause for thought, but that does not appear to be the case.

I understand—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—the Government have established a change in policy that, in terms, promotes establishing trade links and dialogue with the regime in Khartoum as a more effective way of holding it to account for its humanitarian crimes than the regimes we have at the moment imposed. I would be grateful if the Minister in his reply could clarify this and, at the same time, advise us which other countries have subscribed to this policy reversal of trading with, rather than criticising, such an obnoxious regime.

On trade with Africa in general—particularly the impact of the economic partnership agreements, the EPAs, and recognising that I was able to secure a short debate on this subject during the last Session of Parliament some seven months ago—the Government believed that, where the EPAs were correctly implemented and supported, they could support sustainable growth and development. The Government also acknowledged that the jury was still out and will be for some time. As we move forward into Brexit negotiations, how will the UK's longstanding support for the EU's EPAs, as a development-focused trade deal, be affected? How will the loss of the UK leadership that ensured that the EU offered the world's most generous package of market openings for developing countries affect these deals? Will this loss of UK leadership compromise duty-free access, particularly affecting the 44 countries that are involved in Africa?

The then Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Bates, paid tribute to the work that had been done in this area by me as the co-chair of the Africa All-Party Parliamentary Group and placed on the record his wish to have that dialogue continue on those issues. As we move forward, can the Minister confirm that this remains the Government's wish, particularly now that the trade focus is switching towards Commonwealth countries?

This leads me to the final issue I wish to address: the forthcoming Commonwealth summit in London. The Commonwealth summit—formerly known as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, CHOGM—will be held in the spring of 2018. As the president of the National Liberal Club's Commonwealth forum and the former chair of the advisory board of the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, I have a particular interest in the outcomes of this summit, being as it is in London.

The summit will also provide an opportunity to link the Commonwealth agenda to the UN-led sustainable development goals programme. I understand that, in accordance with these goals, the Commonwealth Secretariat is pressing for agreement, through the Commonwealth nations, for the acceptance and implementation of universal human rights as established in the UN charter. In this regard, these same rights are set out in the Commonwealth charter, which has been adopted unanimously by Commonwealth member states. Can the Minister advise noble Lords of the action the Government are taking, and what progress has been

[LORD CHIDGEY]

made, towards meeting these objectives and recording these outcomes in what will become the final communiqué from the summit?

I understand the Government have been working closely with the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to take forward the aims of sustainable development goals 16 and 17 in the context of strengthening good governance, parliamentary democracy and accountability. This may be part of the summit agenda or may take place in parallel fora in the margins. Can the Minister confirm what plans the Government have for promoting both a people's forum and a parliamentary forum in the parallel agenda to the summit, recognising the large number of Commonwealth parliamentarians expected to attend?

3.14 pm

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, while the focus of the gracious Speech was this year very much on Brexit-related matters, and while these will no doubt consume a great deal of our time and attention over the forthcoming extended Session, the wider world is becoming no less troublesome in the meantime; nor will the issues that confront the international community allow us to sit on the sidelines while we agonise over our relationship with the EU. As the Minister has reminded us, North Korea continues down its dangerous path towards an intercontinental nuclear missile capability; China's military growth continues to alarm its neighbours; Russia's tactical opportunism within Europe risks conflict through miscalculation; Syria remains riven between competing factions; the nations of the Gulf are at one another's throats; and, of course, terrorism in all its guises still casts its fatal shadow across our society.

With all this going on it might be thought that we would have little time for navel gazing, but that, alas, is likely to prove a vain hope. It will nevertheless be important for us to lift our sights from time to time and to contemplate the dangerous world that we inhabit and for us to play our part in containing the global risks to our safety and prosperity. The gracious Speech indicated that the Government would ensure that the UK maintained and enhanced its role on the world stage, but this was a vague commitment, included almost en passant. If such an undertaking is to mean anything, it will require a clear-eyed assessment of the risks we face, the will to address them and the tools that are necessary if one is to exercise power in the real world.

As far as risks are concerned, we should view the current situation in the Gulf with considerable alarm. The stability of that region has long been a crucial national interest for us in the UK, but that stability is looking ever more precarious. The wider security and economic implications could become deep and damaging. The Ministry of Defence and the Government more widely have in recent years placed great emphasis on and made much of their Gulf strategy. Could the Minister therefore tell us how the most recent tensions between Qatar and its neighbours have impacted on that strategy and how the Government are responding to this worrying situation?

On the issue of international terrorism, I have been dismayed by recent remarks that seem to attribute our status as a target to our own foreign and security

policy. Have we forgotten why Osama bin Laden founded al-Qaeda in the first place? It was not to attack the West but to overthrow the regime in Saudi Arabia. Have we forgotten the underlying purpose of Daesh? It is not to attack the West but to create a caliphate to oppress the peoples of the Middle East. At their root, these organisations are less concerned with pitting Muslims against non-Muslims than they are with achieving dictatorial power over Islamic nations. There is no doubt that in seeking to counter their loathsome practices and violent purposes we expose ourselves to their wrath and retaliation, but fear of a response should not dictate our policies. History has shown us that appeasement leads only to worse suffering in the long term. There is, of course, plenty of scope for debate about how exactly we should respond to these challenges and there is certainly much room for improvement in the Prevent strand of our counterterrorism strategy, but in formulating our policies the yardstick should be what is most effective in the long run, rather than just what will be safest for us in the short term.

We have been criticised for our extensive engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, for our more ephemeral involvement in Libya and for our lack of presence in Syria. We seem to be in the position of someone who is criticised if they go straight ahead, if they go backwards, if they turn left or right or, indeed, if they stand still. The real problem is that we often have grand ambitions that are totally unrealistic. We cannot transform countries overnight, if at all; nor can we dictate the constitutional and political arrangements under which people live. We can, however, observe the patterns that emerge in international affairs, support those patterns that are reasonably benign and work with partners to suppress those that are malign. This is a limited objective, it is true, but one that we have at least a fair chance of achieving.

To do even this much we will need the necessary tools. The gracious Speech reiterated the Government's commitment to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence. This is welcome, but I, like others, would draw your Lordships' attention to the words "at least". Despite the Minister's remarks about the equipment programme, there is no doubt that the fall in the value of the pound over the past year is impacting on what the MoD can achieve within the present budget. When added to the unrealistic estimate of the extra funds that could be released through efficiency measures—an unrealism that has a long and inglorious history in government accounting—the defence programme is clearly under severe pressure.

Even in these circumstances, it would be unwise to expect a sudden flow of great largesse from the Treasury, and I indulge in no such fantasy. Our overall economic position remains challenging, with a continuing, if reduced, deficit and a burdensome level of debt. Nor should the MoD be exempt from the search for ever greater value for money. But the Government's first responsibility remains the protection of the citizens of the UK and their interests. If they are to meet this crucial obligation, they need to ensure that the defence budget continues to grow in real terms and that the growth represents actual spending power and not funny money.

Finally, our Armed Forces will, as ever, require talented and courageous people of the highest quality if they are to discharge their onerous responsibilities as we and they both expect. They do indeed have superb people, but we must recognise that they are not keeping enough of them for as long as they should, and this is particularly true when it comes to female personnel. I am proud that the Royal Air Force has led the way when it comes to the promotion of women to the most senior ranks, up to and including two-star, but there is much more still to do. Too many talented people, especially women, are leaving early because the terms of their service are not flexible enough to accommodate their evolving personal circumstances and the associated pressures. We cannot afford such waste: it is expensive in terms of training replacements and it impacts on our operational capability.

It will remain the case that service personnel must make sacrifices that would be unacceptable in most civilian occupations. It will remain the case that the demands of operations must often take priority over personal preferences. We must never lower our standards in this regard. Even with these caveats, however, it is surely possible to develop more flexible terms of service that allow people, for a limited period, greater opportunity to accommodate their personal circumstances and thus to retain them and all they offer for much longer. I am therefore grateful to the Minister for outlining the plans that the Government have to deal with this issue and ask that he keeps us updated as the MoD seeks to accomplish what will no doubt be a difficult balancing act.

For Parliament, the next two years may well be predominantly about Brexit, but we live in a complex, dynamic and dangerous world that will care little for our preoccupations. We cannot afford to drop our guard in such an uncertain security environment. We cannot allow the pressure of immediate political events to make us introspective and insular. If we mean what we say about developing a Britain that is confident, outward-looking and engaged, then surely it is here—in this place—and now that we should demonstrate the truth of those sentiments.

3.23 pm

The Earl of Home (Con): My Lords, in the past few weeks, the centre of all our attention has been the horrific events in London and Manchester, and the inevitable comments not only on the behaviour of the terrorists but on the heroic deeds of our services and local populations. It has understandably drawn our attention away from the root of the problem, which is why the terrorists exist at all: where they are and who or what motivates them.

In previous debates, noble Lords have often come to the conclusion that among the main causes of the problem have been extremist teaching and a lack of education. I do not disagree with those conclusions, and we must address these problems here in the United Kingdom. However, we cannot do it alone; the responsibility for solving these problems is not only ours. Many countries around the world are doing nothing to help the situation. The noble Lord, Lord Howell, earlier listed some of the potential blackspots in the world where trouble could break out. All those spots are indeed potential areas for terrorism to start.

Terrorists can come from anywhere in the world, but a significant number, sadly, come from the Arab world, and Arab Governments have a chequered record of success in fighting terrorism. Even among the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, there are differences as to what constitutes unacceptable behaviour, and some GCC countries, along with Egypt, have ostracised Qatar for alleged unacceptable behaviour. Alleged Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Jazeera are two of the excuses which they have given. However, not all the GCC countries have joined Egypt in condemning Qatar. Kuwait and Oman are two of them, and the Emir of Kuwait has tried to conciliate between the two factions. The neutral position of the Sultanate of Oman is interesting. Oman is the only GCC country that has maintained a dialogue with Iran right from the time of the overthrow of the Shah. It has also done as much as, if not more than, other countries to educate and encourage its people to be tolerant of the views of others. It is true that most Omanis are Ibadi rather than Sunni or Shia—which in a way makes it easier, for they are a quieter lot of people—but the Government of Oman have worked hard to teach the virtues of tolerance by bringing together all the citizens of their country to discuss religious issues.

In an interesting article in the *Times* on 10 June, Michael Binyon described some of the Omani initiatives. They include the encouragement of women to get together to talk about religious affairs and the setting-up of call centres to give advice to young Omanis on religious affairs. He further pointed out that, to date, no Omanis are known to have joined Isis. Oman must therefore be doing a lot that is right to educate its population that terrorism is not the answer to the problems of the area. Perhaps the Omanis could help in this respect, but sadly His Majesty Sultan Qaboos is not well and it is unlikely that Oman will take an initiative at this stage. A potentially helpful use of the good will that exists between the UK and the GCC would be to assist other countries to do more of what Oman is doing. We must not try to impose, even if we could, but we could help in the background.

Some 60 years ago, apart from NATO, there were similar groupings in other parts of the world, including SEATO, for the Asia-Pacific region, and CENTO in between SEATO and NATO. Those organisations were far from perfect, but they enabled dialogue between nations and a forum for discussing differences. I suggest that one might look at people working together regionally along those lines. I am sure that Ministers are fed up of going to endless conferences, but it would be no bad thing for them to listen to some of the local issues.

However right or wrong we feel the opposing factions in the Gulf may be, we in the West must be extremely chary before we interfere. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked what we are doing about the affair—the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, also referred to it. I strongly advocate that we do nothing at this stage. Moreover, following yesterday's announcement of the appointment of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, we do not yet know whether his appointment will influence Saudi thinking and in what direction they are going to go. We are not the fount of all knowledge. We may know more about the Arab world than most, but it is

[THE EARL OF HOME]

dangerous for us to mediate at this stage. We have in the past tried to impose Whitehall-type democracy on countries both in the area and in Africa, but self-determination is the only way for countries to go, even if we think that they are making the wrong decisions. I took a Dubai merchant to Prime Minister's Question Time in another place and he was horrified that there should have been a huge row over a million-pound contract when he could sidle up to the ruler and in five minutes be given a contract worth several times that amount.

Nowhere in the world is immune from accusations of graft or corruption, and the Middle East is no exception. When I was involved in project finance, there were many occasions when aid to trade was extremely helpful in winning business. Again, it was not a perfect system, but a euro currency loan, aid and export credits allowed the UK to win a lot of contracts. It had the disadvantage that other countries could not compete, but we will live in a rough, tough world in future after Brexit. It also had the advantage that the great majority of funds for the project never left the UK and the chances of money being diverted into the offshore tax haven bank accounts of undeserving individuals was greatly reduced.

Several oil-producing countries are in considerable financial difficulty at the moment. If we do not help with innovative proposals, our competitors will establish themselves in our place. Shortly before I was in Muscat three months ago, the Chinese were there offering packages in excess of \$2 billion. The Chinese traditionally have not done much in the area, except in Yemen, and it is interesting that they should offer assistance now in amounts that could be very helpful to Oman.

On our departure from the European scene, we will have more flexibility in how we use our money to win contracts. I welcome the reference in the gracious Speech to new Bills to help British business and the initiatives outlined by my noble friend the Minister in his opening remarks. Groups such as UKTI, trade societies and our own embassies do a great job, and Ministers take businesses with them. We used, under the auspices of the DTI, to have area advisory groups covering our interests in various parts of the world. I was involved in one, the Committee for Middle East Trade. It was quite helpful to have a group like that following up on opportunities identified by Ministers, our embassies and trade societies. By and large, these groups were successful. Perhaps we should look again at the good points that came out of them. The world does not owe us a living and we will need everything we can find and all our initiative to help us get business.

3.32 pm

Lord Judd (Lab): My Lords, we have discussed this afternoon Grenfell Tower. I am one of those greatly reassured that we are to have a full public inquiry to find out exactly how it all happened and what the implications are. However, I have one big anxiety that in our desire to learn the lessons of Grenfell Tower we do not overlook our own responsibility—starting with us, the Members of this House. What are the values on which our country operates at the moment? Do responsibility, civic duty and the concept and value of

service have real prominence in our preoccupations or are we too preoccupied with cost and managerial systems that themselves solve nothing? The most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury was absolutely right today in saying that it is the values within the systems that ensure that we have a society worth living in.

When I think of Westminster, Borough Market, Finsbury Park and Manchester, I join those who express deep feeling for the victims and their dependants, and untrammelled admiration for the firefighters, police, ambulance crews and medical personnel. Equally impressive in all this has been the spontaneous public response from so many people. I cannot be alone in how heartened I was by the leadership and example of that courageous imam at Finsbury Park.

Terrorism and extremism are out to break our system but also those things that we believe to be important underlying our society. That is why it is so important to stand firm and resist the counterproductivity that can easily begin to creep in to our response. I worry about the erosion of the values and qualities that make our society worth protecting. That is a real victory for the extremists. It is at the very time of the most pressures that we must be most resolute and demonstrably firm in our commitments.

Of course, in responding to the immediate situation we must emphasise the vital importance of properly resourced security services. Intelligence and security cannot be overestimated in our ability to prepare for awful events and to avoid danger when it can be avoided. I am glad that there has been emphasis on the armed services this afternoon. We must constantly measure the real threats, as they are changing all the time. Are we really meeting effectively the real threats that exist? Of course, we can be certain that the situation is volatile and full of unpredictability. Flexibility and adaptability and more than adequate but generous provision of equipment are necessary, as well as all the issues of recruitment and human resources that we have been discussing.

I have one anxiety, which is not always very acceptable in debates about defence, about Polaris and Trident. It is quite a big anxiety. I not only accept but endorse the importance of our nuclear deterrent, but the expenditure on Polaris and Trident has been so vast and so disproportionate that I worry that we could begin to slip into a defensive attitude towards the systems themselves and become hidebound, and by not providing adequately for all the other points I have mentioned, we would not be able to meet the real situations and the real developments as we should. Therefore, I do not think there is any harm in keeping this whole issue of the disproportionate cost—some might argue whether or not it is disproportionate but it seems to me to be out of all proportion—of Polaris and Trident against the real needs in the real world in which we are living.

Whatever we are doing in defence, we must always be ready and prepared to operate within an international context. It is inconceivable that in any situations which will confront us in the foreseeable future we would be acting alone. Therefore, how far are we all the time prepared and ready to act in an international setting? Whatever happens on Brexit, our interdependence—and,

indeed, dependence on the world—will not go away. It is true in issues of security and terrorism, about which I have been speaking. It is true of crime, trafficking and drugs. If we see that the ultimate battle with extremism is the battle for hearts and minds, I would be interested to hear how far the Government have considered a role for UNESCO and other similar international organisations in joining us in that battle for hearts and minds.

On refugees, the issues we are facing are small compared with the issues that are going to build up in many parts of the world. This is intimately related to global insecurity and extremism. Therefore, are we standing firm in our support for the UNHCR? Do we think enough about the critical role in international stability that the UNHCR is playing?

On Paris and climate change, there are few of us in this House—there are still some—who would deny that this is an inescapable issue for us all. How are we addressing this in a practical way? Again, how far do we look at the issues of climate change in relation to our anxieties about international stability, extremism and terrorism? There are relationships. Energy speaks for itself, as do trade and finance.

However, there is another issue: law and justice. I have been deeply depressed by the tendency to talk about the European Court of Justice as being somehow a threat to our independence. What is clear is that in many spheres of law and justice there is a cross-frontier, cross-border dimension. In civil law, this stretches from the importance of the care of children to issues of copyright. All the distinguished lawyers whom I have been privileged to hear in the EU Justice sub-committee of this House have argued—

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen (Con): My Lords—

Lord Judd: I understand. I also make the point that is perhaps not too often made in this House—that an advisory figure is an advisory figure.

According to all those lawyers whom I have heard, the situation is improving. The operation of the law is getting better at meeting the real needs. Again, I give as an example the needs of children in broken families.

I was mighty glad that, in introducing this debate, the Minister emphasised the importance of the UN. We were founders of the UN. We played a crucial part in its development, with distinguished people such as Brian Urquhart. We are permanent members of the Security Council and in that context we have a special responsibility. I commend to the House—and I declare an interest as someone who has been involved with the organisation my whole life—the very interesting recent report by the United Nations Association, titled *Keeping Britain Global*. It is worth reading. I hope the Government have read it and I hope they will have a detailed response to all the points that it raises.

3.44 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, whom I too welcome to his new portfolio, brings with him the beautiful and challenging proclamation of the Ahmadi community, from which he springs, that we should have,

“Love for all, hatred for none”.

It is a proclamation born in suffering. Ahmadis themselves have experienced hateful persecution: recall Mr Shah, the Ahmadi shopkeeper murdered in Glasgow; recall the Ahmadis and Christians fleeing appalling persecution in Pakistan, who make up more than half of the 7,500 refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. Many are incarcerated in detention centres, which I and my noble friend Lady Cox have visited, and where Mr Ijaz Paras Masih, a Pakistani Christian asylum seeker, was recently found dead.

To counter such religious hatred, perhaps the Minister could tell us what initiatives DfID is taking to promote Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which insists that freedom of religion and belief should be a fundamental human right, how Article 18 relates to sustainable development goal 16, DfID's UK aid strategy objectives and the allocation of resources, and whether the Government see Article 18 as a key to combating violent extremism and central to the creation of a tolerant, respectful and peaceful society.

But secular ideologies can promote hatred, too. Take the situation in North Korea, referred to by the noble Earl, Lord Howe, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins. I should mention that I am co-chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea. The House will recall that, in March, the toxic nerve agent VX was used to assassinate the pro-China and pro-reform half-brother of Kim Jong-un in Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Since then, and in the face of United Nations Security Council resolutions and international sanctions, North Korea has continued the relentless, provocative testing of nuclear weapons. Although Chinese oil and coal sanctions are welcome, the Minister might like to confirm that, nevertheless, trade rose in the first six months of this year. Meanwhile, South Korea's new President, Moon Jae-in, has assumed office; the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence missile system, THAAD, has partially been put in place; the American student, Otto Warmbier, was returned to the US in a coma and tragically died on Monday last, while other American citizens continue to be incarcerated and held hostage—obscenely, being used as bargaining chips. Closer to home, last weekend security officials suggested that North Korea was behind the cyberattack on the National Health Service computer system. Maybe the Minister will comment on that when he comes to reply.

In 2014, a United Nations report found that the gravity, scale and nature of the human rights violations in North Korea have, in its words, no parallel in any other country in the contemporary world and amount to crimes against humanity. Abuses included enslavement, extermination, murder, rape and other sexual crimes, deliberate starvation, and enforced disappearances, “pursuant to policies ... at the highest level of the state”.

Why, therefore, have they not been referred to the International Criminal Court or a regional tribunal? Why has nobody been held to account? How are we seeking to engage China in all this by meeting its own obligations to North Korean refugees?

China holds all the important cards. It has the experience and resources to bring about internal change to this rogue state, and its model of economic reform

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

is the right one. It is in China's economic and security interests to do this. North Korea is a millstone around China's neck; by contrast, South Korea is a vibrant and dynamic partner. In the first four months of 2017, China's bilateral trade with South Korea surpassed \$85 billion, making this phenomenal Asian democracy China's third-largest trading partner and its number one source of imports. By contrast, trade over the same period with the emasculated North Korea was a mere \$1.6 billion. It is entirely in China's self-interest urgently to help to bring about change. Only a fundamental change will pave the way for the ending of nuclear blackmail, the de-escalation of military provocations, the formal ending of the 1950-53 war and, ultimately, the reunification of the peninsula.

Our argument is not with the people of North Korea but with a cruel ideology. We should encourage South Korea to intensify ways of reaching out to North Korea's people over the heads of their regime, whose mythology and propaganda must be debunked. Seoul should convene a high-level conference with Russia, China and the United States to demonstrate to the people of the north that the international community's argument is also not with them but with their rulers. The United Kingdom can play its part in doing more to keep human rights at the forefront and by helping to break the information blockade. Perhaps when the Minister replies, he will tell us when the BBC World Service will begin its promised transmissions to the peninsula.

The failure to bring to justice those responsible for crimes in North Korea is also pertinent to the genocide against Christians, Yazidis and other minorities in Syria and Iraq, which were referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and about which I have secured an Oral Question in your Lordships' House on Monday next. Genocide, as the United Nations itself has declared, is never a word to be used lightly, but it is what the House of Commons declared in April 2016 has been underway in Iraq and Syria. The scandalous failure to provide justice or even to establish mechanisms for trying those responsible for mass executions, sexual slavery, rape and other forms of gender-based violence, torture, mutilation and the enlistment and forced recruitment of children shames us all.

Looking to the future, perhaps the Minister will tell us how he sees the future for Iraq's minorities. Will they be able to resettle in Mosul and Nineveh? What help will they be given? Will they be provided with security and protection? Will those who have waged genocide against them be brought to justice? What is being done to prosecute those Iraqi officials who have called for Christians and other minorities to be executed?

The UN estimates that some 400,000 Syrians have been killed and more than 5 million have fled the country since the war began in 2011. Another 6.3 million people are internally displaced. Yet, in the face of all this, too often the United Nations has been missing in action. The international community failed to end the war, failed to protect civilians and failed to bring the perpetrators to justice. What does the agony of Aleppo say about the impotence of the UN and the international community?

Multiple dangers are facing humanity today: resurgent nationalism; Islamist terrorism; refugees and mass migration; globalisation; nuclear proliferation; digital technology and cyberwarfare; varying forms of totalitarianism; ideologies hostile to free societies; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; the abject failure to resolve conflicts, whether in Sudan, Syria or Afghanistan; and the blights of famine, poverty and inequality. In facing all these challenges, I hope that Her Majesty's Government will make better use of the expertise, good will and experience available in all parts of your Lordships' House.

3.52 pm

Baroness Tonge (Non-Affl): My Lords, I am very tempted to congratulate the Government on surviving well into the second day of this Session, but I shall resist the temptation and instead thank them for their continued support of the 0.7% of GNI going to international development. It is very welcome. It benefits us as well, through the knock-on effects of developing the poorest people in the world. Other noble Lords have mentioned that. I was a little apprehensive when Priti Patel was first given the post of Secretary of State for International Development. Having met her and heard her speeches on several occasions, I welcome her back with her team, including our very own colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Bates, who I gather is in Africa today—quite right, too.

I am delighted that DfID will remain a separate department from the FCO, and I welcome collaboration between DfID, the FCO and the Ministry of Defence. This is especially important in fragile states to facilitate the delivery of aid, but I worry that funds intended for development in the poorest countries of the world may be diverted to prop up the budgets of other departments—we have already heard about the parlous state of the British Navy. I hope the Minister can assure us that DfID funds are safe from predators and that the department keeps poverty eradication as its main aim.

Another concern is the way the Commonwealth Development Corporation is to operate in the future. Extra funding is welcome, but I cannot believe that investment in companies in South Africa and India is the appropriate use of CDC funds. The trickle-down effect in those countries does not appear to be working to help the poor, and CDC funds were intended originally, again, for the poorest countries and the poorest people of the world.

I am particularly looking forward to the family planning summit on 11 July. Here I should declare an interest as a former doctor in the NHS working in sexual and reproductive health and, until the election, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health. Sadly, the summit will be without Dr Babatunde Osotimehin—he would laugh, again, if he heard me trying to pronounce his name—the executive director of UNFPA, who died suddenly recently. We must pay tribute to the work that he has done over the last two decades promoting reproductive health for women and girls. He will be sorely missed.

This leads me to my main concern, which is the future funding of sexual and reproductive health while the Trump Administration survives in the USA. Donald Trump

has ordered the reinstatement of the “gag” rule—also called the Mexico City policy—which bans the funding of any organisation working in the field of sexual and reproductive health which may also advise on abortion, even if it does not offer those services. That means virtually all organisations which deliver sexual and reproductive health services. It really does affect them all: it is simply impossible to work in this field, as I know, without including some reference to abortion at some stage. I remind noble Lords that 22 million unsafe abortions are performed every year, leading to 50,000 to 70,000 maternal deaths. I often wonder whether Donald Trump would support the existing children of those motherless families following unsafe abortions.

The added cruel twist from the Trump Administration has been to stop the funding for the UNFPA, which has never provided abortion services. It seems that the President of the USA does not like contraception either, because there is a now a \$610 million funding gap for those services worldwide. This level of funding, it is estimated, provides 28 million women and men with contraceptive services and supplies, prevents 2.4 million abortions, prevents 6 million unintended pregnancies and prevents 12,000 maternal deaths every year. Has anyone told Donald Trump this, sent him a few pictures maybe or taken him out to see the suffering of these women all over the world? I am sure they have not. He has become the Grim Reaper of women's lives in the poorest countries. According to the latest Guttmacher Institute figures—these have come down slightly—an estimated 214 million women in developing countries would like to delay or stop childbearing but cannot access contraception. The summit in July has been convened to try to fill this enormous funding gap created by Donald Trump. Let us all hope it succeeds, and I wish it well.

I also put in a plea to the Minister—I know he is in Africa, but I hope it will be transmitted to him—on behalf of the big NGOs working in this field. I am thinking particularly of International Planned Parenthood Federation and Marie Stopes International because they are still, under this new Administration, suffering great uncertainty about their funding from our Government, despite the stated aim to support sexual and reproductive health for women and girls. This is a priority in our international development department, but those organisations are yet to receive guidelines as to how to apply for their funding. They help so many women worldwide on our behalf—women who are now suffering because DfID has delayed funding or is altering the way it is distributed. Please will the Minister tell us when this uncertainty will end?

Lastly, and I make no apology for repeating this, whenever I speak on this subject, whether in Parliament or elsewhere, I remind people that development depends on economic growth, and statistics have shown that this occurs when women have fewer children and can access education and join the workforce: the empowerment of women, in fact—it is a favourite phrase. However, women can be empowered only if they are given power over their own bodies, particularly control over their own fertility. That means reproductive health services and family planning in particular. That is so important, and I trust Ministers will recite that to themselves every night before they go to sleep.

4 pm

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, I add my own very warm welcome to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his new portfolio. I will focus on two countries that I visited recently, Sudan and Syria.

Starting with Sudan, I shall highlight four key issues, beginning with the continuing violence perpetrated by the Government of Sudan in Darfur, the Nuba mountains in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, that was so well described by the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey. In Darfur, war has claimed over 300,000 lives and displaced over 2.5 million people. Although violence has erupted again between the Government and rebel groups, the UN Security Council is contemplating severe cuts to the UNAMID budget. This is dangerously inappropriate, and I hope the UK will be pressing for the extension of UNAMID to all areas of Darfur and the investigation of human rights abuses, particularly the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Jebel Marra region.

Secondly, there are humanitarian crises in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan. I visited the Nuba mountains in January to obtain first-hand evidence of the suffering of the people there. I climbed a steep mountain to visit families forced by the Khartoum Government's aerial bombardment to flee from their homes and live in horrific snake-infested caves. I sat with a woman dying of malaria in one of those caves, and I met a father whose five children had been burned alive when a shell dropped by a government Antonov ignited the straw around his home. There are no medicines, and every drop of water and all food has to be carried up that steep mountain. There is still no peace deal and no resolution to the aid blockade. Will Her Majesty's Government pressure the Government of Sudan to reach an agreement with opposition forces to open up humanitarian corridors as a matter of great urgency?

Thirdly, I refer to the UK/Sudan strategic dialogue. Will the Government link any further engagement with Sudan to the issues I have highlighted: humanitarian access to the two areas, the survival of UNAMID and permission for UNAMID to access the Jebel Marra region?

Fourthly, there is the issue of the lifting of sanctions. The US is likely to approve the full lifting of sanctions on 12 July. However, the lifting of those sanctions should be allowed only with clear and measurable progress, including the following requirements: unimpeded humanitarian access to the war-affected areas in Darfur, the Nuba mountains and Blue Nile; the verifiable cessation of hostilities; and serious peace negotiations with the armed movements. Without peace, the lifting of sanctions will enable more resources to be available to the regime to fuel the war. On 26 April, when Brad Brooks-Rubin gave his testimony to the US House sub-committee on Africa, his previous testimony was cited as follows:

“Sudan has used the provisional easing of sanctions put in place in January not to begin the necessary reforms of structural deformities of the country's economy but instead order fighter jets and battle tanks from its traditional arms suppliers in Russia and China”.

Human rights must be added to the conditions. At a bare minimum, sanctions should not be lifted while human rights defenders Mudawi Ibrahim and Hafiz

[BARONESS COX]

Idris are detained and mistreated. Targeted sanctions are needed that will impact the regime and those responsible for the continuing conflict and abuse of human rights, such as freezing the assets of those responsible or sectoral sanctions focused on those involved with weapons manufacturing and companies associated with corruption and human rights abuses. Will Her Majesty's Government maintain close monitoring of the fulfilment of these conditions if sanctions are lifted and intervene appropriately if they are violated?

I turn now to another tragic country: Syria. During our visits, everyone we met, including representatives of different faith communities and professions, such as the doctors' society in Aleppo, highlighted common concerns. The first is the UK Government's commitment to enforced regime change and the removal of President Assad. While it is impossible to condone violations of human rights, including the use of torture, by President Assad and other Middle Eastern Governments, everyone to whom we spoke now sees President Assad as the only effective bulwark against ISIS. These include people active in opposition who originally took part in the demonstrations that erupted into the current war. One put the position very vividly—and his feelings were typical of all whom we met. He said, "I never voted for Assad; I always called for reforms and change—but now I would die for him". There is a widespread fear that any regime change and removal of Assad would lead to a far greater evil—another Libya or Iraq.

The second concern is the UK Government's role in the war. The UK had no legal grounds to intervene in Syria. It did not act according to the UN charter or the UN Security Council; it was not asked by the legitimate Government of Syria to intervene; and it was not attacked by Syria. But Britain is supporting and training so-called "moderate rebels", who are actually members of radical groups, many related to ISIS and its related groups. The UK has also given air support to ISIS by striking the Syrian army on many occasions. In December 2016 the UK admitted taking part in the killing of 82 Syrian soldiers in Deir ez-Zor. More crimes were committed recently against Syrian soldiers in the Tanaf area on the Syrian/Iraqi border. Perhaps I may ask the Minister what UK taxpayers' money has done for peace for Syria, and whether the Government will provide public accountability for the use of taxpayers' money in supporting rebel groups in Syria.

Thirdly, I turn to the US/UK response to the recent chemical weapon incident. To put this in context, President Assad is recognised internationally by the American and French Presidents and several Governments. The Syrian army is advancing and claiming territories previously lost to terrorists groups. Suddenly an unknown chemical attack occurs in Idlib, the stronghold of al-Qaeda in Syria. Without any investigation, the Americans hit an airbase in Homs that is used in the fight against ISIS. The UK Government praise the hit. There are many questions about the kind of gas used, its availability and by whom it was used. Therefore, the aerial attack was widely seen as intemperate and immensely harmful—and, until today, there have still been no investigations.

Fourthly, I turn to humanitarian needs and the effect of sanctions, which are crippling the state and preventing it providing life for its people. Syria is

struggling to get machinery, raw materials, fuel and such basic necessities as flour and medicines. This is causing great suffering to innocent civilians and having a detrimental effect on attempts to encourage people displaced by ISIS to return to their homes once they have been liberated. The effect of food shortages on innocent civilians was graphically expressed by a local person who said, "If you don't die from the bombing and the bullets, you die from the beheadings. If you don't die from the beheadings, you die from starvation thanks to sanctions".

Given the continuing suffering of the people of Syria, exacerbated by UK foreign policy, I was very encouraged to read the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations, published on 2 May, already referred to by the noble Lords, Lord Howell of Guildford and Lord Purvis of Tweed. The report states:

"British confusion and disarray in Syria is a reflection of the contradictions in international policy on President Bashar al-Assad, which must be rethought. The objective of displacing Assad, as a prerequisite of any settlement, with the current means and policy, has proved unachievable. Despite the chemical attack and the recent escalation of military conflict Assad, with Russian support, remains in power ... There are no good options available in Syria but the recent chemical attack, the urgency of the humanitarian crisis, with the potential to destabilise the EU and countries of the Middle East with refugees, requires the UK, and international community, to redouble its efforts to achieve a negotiated solution".

I conclude by asking whether the Minister will give an assurance that the Government will respond positively to these very important recommendations.

4.09 pm

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, I refer the House to my registered non-financial interest as president of the Conservative Friends of Israel and add my welcome to my noble friend Lord Ahmad to his role. I wish him well. Something I did not prepare may surprise Members of the House: I have to say that I agreed with every word of the excellent speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge.

Two nights ago, the Prime Minister received a phone call from Prime Minister Netanyahu, following the awful attack at the mosque in Finsbury Park. After every atrocity, Prime Minister Netanyahu has rung and written to offer support, but the read-out from the latest call was that Israel and the UK would continue working together to counter terrorism and extremism in all its guises. It was agreed that the relationship between the UK and Israel would continue to go from strength to strength. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the UK's commitment to a two-state solution, enabling an Israel free from terrorism and a viable Palestinian state. UK-Israel relations are in a good place. The two-way trade in 2016 was nearly £6 billion, and I pay tribute to His Excellency David Quarrey, the British ambassador in Israel, and His Excellency Mark Regev, the Israeli ambassador here, for their professionalism and dedication.

But something else is going on in the region. In part as a result of Iran's regional ambitions, as it increases its supply of weapons to a proxy Hezbollah, and the threat of ISIS, it is clear that there is an alignment of interests between Israel and her neighbours in the

Gulf, opening unprecedented lines of communication. This will and already has led to a regional push towards progress in the peace process, which is all good news. However, Iran continues to fund terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which is bad news. Iran played a key part in the formation of Hezbollah in 1982, and has openly provided financial assistance, weapons, ammunition and military training to the group for more than three decades. Do not take my word—take that of the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon before leaving office, when he said that the budget of Hezbollah, its salaries, expenses, weapons and missiles all came from the Republic of Iran. It is estimated that Iran has supplied Hezbollah with up to 150,000 rockets and more advanced weapons which are situated worryingly close to Israel's northern border in Lebanon. Hezbollah does not recognise the State of Israel but calls for its destruction. Its record of international terrorism I do not have the time to list—and yes, Hezbollah, together with Hamas, has been described by the Leader of the Opposition as his “friends”.

On Monday, I wrote to the Home Secretary after the al-Quds march that took place last Sunday, which I raised in the House earlier. Hezbollah flags were repeatedly displayed in direct contravention of Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Separating Hezbollah into military and political wings is untenable and an artificial exercise; its own senior leaders have long insisted that its military and non-military activities are indivisible. The United States, Canada, the Netherlands, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council have all designated the entirety of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, and I urge the Minister to talk to his friends and the Home Secretary. In the wake of several deadly attacks against civilians in this country, it is time that the UK demonstrates its commitment to combating extremism and joining our important allies in proscribing the terror group in its entirety.

I turn to an area where the UK can and often does play a positive and influential role. While it is true that I have been critical of some aspects of DfID activity within the Palestinian Authority, much of which fails the test of transparency, on the one hand, and frees up money so that convicted terrorists receive salaries while serving time in jail, on the other, overall the UK taxpayer can and should be proud of the work and achievements of DfID. As Secretary of State Priti Patel stated:

“To those who doubt the ability of our aid to make a difference: tell that to the millions of children protected from paralysing polio by the British taxpayer, or the millions of Kenyans whose lives have been transformed by mobile money invented with British assistance, or the people of Sierra Leone who are getting back to their daily lives, free from Ebola after UK intervention”.

I am certain that Priti will continue to ensure that our support goes to the right place in a transparent and correct way.

This week, I talked to the high commissioner of Rwanda, the extremely effective and respected Yamina Karitanyi. She confirmed to me that aid from the UK to her country is one of the major reasons why Rwanda has lifted more than 1.5 million of its citizens out of poverty.

DfID has helped to enhance the domestic resource mobilisation IT systems for customs and revenue and tax collection. Remarkably, today, domestic resources amount to 62%, external borrowing 19.7% and aid grants 19.3%. This compares to aid dependency in 1994 of 95%. DfID has helped the development of the financial sector, including capital market establishment in a 10-year development plan, and the training of civil servants, and has supported central government priority sectors such as education, agriculture and public management.

Rwanda post 1994 has been very efficient at using aid to implement a citizen-centred approach to governance and, it appears, will soon graduate to non-reliance on foreign aid. It is now focused on enhancing its trade partnerships: a great DfID legacy which will translate into a post-Brexit trade deal. I agree with my noble friend Lord Howell, who ended his thoughtful contribution by calling for deeper co-operation within the Commonwealth. Rwanda was not an original member of the Commonwealth, but chose to join. My noble friend was right: with 2 billion people in 52 countries all using common law and the English language, it is a market we should be expanding.

When our aid is focused, so much can be achieved, and I am confident that the Secretary of State will succeed in making UK taxpayers proud of their generosity and their support.

4.16 pm

Lord Alli (Lab): My Lords on my way to the Chamber today, I was congratulated on my new post in the Foreign Office. Let me say to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, on my behalf as well as that of the noble Lord who congratulated me, welcome to your new job.

History is marked by landmarks of time, people and places. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the decriminalisation of homosexuality, when a Labour MP and a Conservative Peer worked to pass the Sexual Offences Act in 1967. It was by no means a perfect piece of legislation, but it started the process of bringing life for gay men out of the shadows and into the open.

It is easy against the backdrop of Brexit and the threat of terror attacks to forget to acknowledge and celebrate the progress we have made together as a nation. It is easy to forget how extraordinary this country is and how extraordinary the people of this island are. When our way of life is attacked it is because we have a choice, that we as a people will be free, and that we will recognise, tolerate—and, more than that, celebrate—the diversity of our island. We see this not just in the plight of gay rights but in the progress in the rights of women, in racial equality and in the rights for people with disabilities. There will always be those who seek to create a wedge between communities and countries, or try to pitch one section of society against another or nations against nations.

We should be vigilant in this House against those who try to divide us. My freedom as a gay man or a racial minority is irrevocably linked to the freedoms of every Member of this House and of the nation generally. As we reflect on the Parliament ahead, it is worth remembering that divided people are a weaker people.

[LORD ALLI]

That is why equality matters not only to the individuals concerned but speaks to the character of our country, in a way that matters to all of us all whether gay or straight, black or white, religious or not.

This Parliament will be dominated by Brexit. It could, if we are not careful, define our foreign policy. I want our foreign policy to be based on values and morality, not Brexit. I want a modern morality, not the Victorian version but a new modern British version—one that is based on equality and freedom and one which we should be proud to export. Too often we duck the big moral issues to advance self-interest. Too often it is the big corporations that drive the international agenda and the values that we cherish are relegated to second place: trade for hunger; disease to keep medicine at a competitive price; supporting oppressive regimes to further our short-term strategic interests; selling arms to people who have no business owning them. The people who see this most clearly are the young in our society. They can see the growing discrepancy between the super-rich corporations and the individual. We experienced some of that at the last election.

I want to focus in the time that I have left on the treatment of gay men and women across the world. Despite the progress that we have made, it is still surprising that homosexuality is still criminalised in more than 72 countries, many of which are in the Commonwealth. In retrospect, one mistake made back in 1967 was not to ensure that the change in the law at home was the driver of reform across the Commonwealth too. It was Britain which imposed the vast majority of these laws and we therefore have a duty to be part of removing them. As the UK prepares to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, we need to see clear leadership to get that number from 72 to zero. Across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the threat of the death penalty remains in place in a number of countries. We should use our United Nations voice to act to outlaw the death penalty on grounds of sexual orientation and sanction states that do not do so.

I am sorry that the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury is not in his place because I agreed with so much of what he said. I would say to him that religion also has its role to play in defining a new modern morality. There are some simple things that the most reverend Primate could do. A liturgy for civil partnership would be a small step, and the acceptance of gay marriage—maybe a step too far—would give some hope. Morality can stem from love too.

In the last few months alone, we have seen shocking reports of the persecution of gay men in Chechnya, with documented reports of torture, disappearances and the return of concentration camps to our continent. I raised this issue with Members of this House before the election and I genuinely thank all those who replied and all those who wrote to the Russian ambassador to outline their concerns. I hope that the Government will now look favourably on the asylum claims of those fleeing persecution, as President Macron has recently done in France, and I ask the Minister to put pressure on the Home Office to speed up this work.

There is still much to do on the broader moral issues, and much to do in relation to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the Commonwealth and beyond. And it is noble Lords in the Foreign Office who have the opportunity to do it. I say to Ministers and their colleagues in the other place: do not look back and regret not taking the opportunity to act. Governing is a real privilege and those who sit on the Front Benches have, sometimes, the opportunity to effect change. My plea to noble Lords is to use it well.

4.24 pm

Lord Shutt of Greetland (LD): My Lords, here in the UK, the election was announced on 18 April, over nine weeks ago, and our last day in this House was 27 April. Since then we have had the election, we have had disturbances and we have had our tragedies, and we are saddened by these events. The islands of the South Atlantic have had problems of a different order. In May 2016, the St Helena airport was meant to open with a fanfare and an air service. A year has gone by, and the problems of wind shear and the lack of a wind shear-proof air service have meant that even though a new contract was supposed to have been awarded on 31 May this year, it has not happened. This has meant that the RMS “St Helena” kept sailing, until it broke down. Two sailings were lost and many people were stranded in Cape Town, South Africa. However, after much delay, an aircraft was mustered to bring the Saints back to St Helena. That at least proved that there were “footloose” aircraft available for such a service to be quickly provided.

I would like to ask the Minister—I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his new role—where the interim air service is now. Of course, the air service was also supposedly to embrace the island of Ascension. In late April, just as we were leaving this place, we were told that there were problems with the Wideawake airport on Ascension Island. The Ascension Island Government press release dated 28 April states that, “the Airbus A330 Voyager aircraft used on the route between RAF Brize Norton, Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands is too heavy to land at Ascension”, and will not call at Ascension “for the foreseeable future”. There is very serious doubt about whether interim arrangements can be made. If they can, they will be for,

“essential personnel and goods only. Ascension Island Travel Agency are unable to say when regular flights ... may resume”.

The Ascension Island Government state that they do not expect the South Atlantic Airbridge flights with the Voyager aircraft “to recommence before 2019/20”. That could be three years away. What does this mean for Ascension and St Helena? Twin-island tourism will be stopped for three years. The only hotel on Ascension—the Obsidian—cannot function without guests, and that business is now in crisis. The alternative faster route from the UK to St Helena via Ascension will not be available. It is now possible to get to St Helena after a three-day sea voyage, an overnight flight and perhaps a stay in Ascension. That, of course, is far shorter than a six-day voyage from St Helena to Cape Town. Furthermore, the route is blocked for Saints who work in the Falkland Islands and wish to travel home from time to time. What worldwide travel and costs are

likely to be incurred by those Saints, and how on earth do they get from St Helena to the Falkland Islands, and vice versa, in the future?

Incidentally, anybody who wants to be an observer at the St Helena elections, which will take place on 26 July, had better pack their suitcase now, because they will need to leave at the end of this month and they will not get back until the middle of August. That is the extent of isolation now. I question the arrangements that the UK and the US have in relation to Ascension. The use of the American-owned airport is governed by a note that is revised from time to time and was last revised on 6 June 2016. Incidentally, the previous note expired on 30 September 2014. The note says that all costs arising from civil aircraft use of Ascension's Wideawake airport shall be borne by the UK Government. Civilian aircraft in any event have to pay \$1,900 every time an aeroplane goes up and every time one goes down. The UK has to reimburse the US for the refurbishment of the runway. This seems to be a rather one-sided agreement. Is not the US supposed to be a friendly country? Is that runway immune from deterioration caused by the regular use of US aircraft?

Travel to and from the Atlantic isles is one thing; a viable economy is another. On the one hand, the St Helena Airport was to improve transport links and to create the possibility of an enhanced tourism-based economy, but getting the airport, the air service and other infrastructure right is something else. Four years ago, I was in St Helena and I saw the start of a hotel development, which is just about to be finished—it takes time. Other hotel developments are planned but are all stalled. Other infrastructure needs are required. A wharf has been built for the new freight boat, but it cannot be used without further infrastructure, including working on problems with rock stabilisation and the highways by the wharf. The government policy on the overseas territories, updated in May 2015, says:

"Although most Territories are economically self sufficient"—not, incidentally, St Helena, Ascension or Tristan da Cunha—

"their reasonable assistance needs are a first call on the UK's international development budget".

There are also warm words about "security and good governance" and,

"political, economic, social and educational advancement".

The UK Government are,

"ambitious for our Territories ... We want to see our communities flourish ... with strong and sustainable local economies".

What do Her Majesty's Government intend to do to enhance the infrastructure of St Helena in particular so that the airport investment is redeemed in a growing economy? Now that the Commonwealth Development Corporation—the CDC—has had its resources richly enhanced, should not some small proportion be used to assist in some private sector development in St Helena? Are not the multitude of problems a very serious first call on that 0.7% of GNI aid budget and the CDC resources? No further legislation is needed, just action.

4.32 pm

Lord Crisp (CB): My Lords, as described by many noble Lords today, enormous changes are under way in the world, accompanied by many dangers and risks.

Moreover, as many noble Lords have said, we need to redefine UK foreign policy and reshape our place in the world—and, of course, determine how best to manage the risks and take advantage of the opportunities provided by these changes.

I will attempt to deal with only a small part of this vast canvas: the bit concerning the development agenda. In doing so, however, I note a profound point made by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury. Like the noble Lord, Lord Judd, I noted the most reverend Primate's warning about the fact that our external presence and actions need to be built on values that are lived out in what happens within our own country and society. This is not the time to discuss the injustices, inequalities and fractures in our own society that have been so tragically illustrated by recent events. However, the point is well made that our domestic and foreign agendas and actions should coincide and that they can and should influence each other.

I also note the importance of networks—a point which, when the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, was speaking, reminded me of the earlier Select Committee report on the UK's soft power. As I recall it, the report said that one of the key things in the future for the UK was being the best-networked country in the world. We need to build those relationships and have those networks with everyone in the world—in Europe, the Commonwealth and elsewhere.

It seems to me that those two points are enormously important when we turn to development. As a number of noble Lords have said, we have a great recent tradition of development, and I, like others, am delighted that the 0.7% target has been maintained into this Parliament. Originally I had some concerns about a minimum spending commitment because of the risks of inefficiency. However, I think that the election campaign, where this policy became an issue in a number of places, revealed how important it was that this political commitment was made and that the target has been secured and will continue.

The other important thing that came out of the election was that we need a new way of talking about international development. Like the noble Lord, Lord Collins, I noted Priti Patel's comments about helping to create a world with justice, equality, jobs, peace and security. This is not just about charity, compassion and looking after other people, and nor is it just about government action; it is also about community action. Something very positive is fed back into the domestic agenda from the development agenda. When people get together around the charities in which many of us are involved concerning areas of development globally, this is very unifying and feeds back into our own country in very positive ways.

As I said, this is not just about charity and compassion; rather, it is more about what I tend to think of as global development or co-development, where we and our partners gain from the processes of development, and I shall give two examples where there are very direct benefits to the United Kingdom. One concerns malaria. Malaria No More recently published a report looking at the impact of malaria on the world. I should perhaps declare an interest in that I wrote the foreword for it, but it made the interesting point that

[LORD CRISP]

14% of global trade is with countries that have malaria and that those countries lose something of the order of 1% of GDP every year, cumulatively, because of the impact of malaria on their populations and people's ability to be productive citizens. That means that the growth of these actual and promising trading partners of ours is restricted, and that has a natural knock-on effect on our society and our growth. Indeed, the UK has the largest number of imported malaria cases in the world. Malaria is an issue for us in the UK. It is not just about being nice and supportive and helping other people; it has a wider impact on our society.

My second point is one that I will come back to with another illustration in a moment. We need to approach global development or co-development with a degree of humility. I see this particularly within the health field, where we have a lot to learn from working with our partners overseas, just as we have much to teach. There is a great expression which goes, "Everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn", and that is profoundly true in development, as I will illustrate in a moment.

Finally, I come to two instances on which I would be grateful if the Minister could manage to get answers for me, although this is not his portfolio. The first is health partnerships. Over the last few years there has been a DfID programme in the region of £30 million supporting partnerships between UK hospitals, organisations and health institutions and those in other countries—in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. These have been enormously valuable, and an evaluation of the programme by DfID last year identified the clear benefits to the UK. Individual doctors and nurses taking part in these partnerships were coming back having seen different things, having thought about different things and having had to do things without all their normal equipment—returning, if you like, to first principles in how they worked. They found it refreshing and it has fed back into training and development in the UK. That scheme came to an end at the end of March. There had been a lot of discussion about trying to make sure there was not a gap between it and a successor scheme. We heard many promises before the election about a new and extended programme coming our way. Will the Minister find out for us the plan for this? When will a new partnerships for health programme of this sort be relaunched?

The second area I shall touch on is nursing. In the previous Parliament I co-chaired the All-Party Group on Global Health, which had the involvement of a number of noble Lords here, including the noble Baroness, Lady Cox. We looked at the development of nursing globally. In doing so we came to three very simple conclusions, and that if you did something to promote and develop nursing globally you would address three sustainable development goals. The first is improving health. Nurses are everywhere. There are 23 million of them. They are half the workforce. They get to places other people, including doctors, do not get to. Secondly, you would also be empowering women. I note the very important point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, on contraception and abortion, but there are other aspects as well. There is a clear demonstration in a number of countries that nursing is a route for

women's empowerment as they become not only more educated, but more economically active as a result. There are some direct benefits from that.

Thirdly, as demonstrated by a recent report from the UN on health employment and global growth, employment in health systems in low and middle-income countries leads to direct economic benefits. There is a triple impact here from supporting the development of nursing: improved health, promoting gender equality and strengthening economies locally. My question for the Minister is: does the Department for International Development recognise the pivotal role nurses have in this? If so, what is it going to do to support it?

I conclude by coming back to the larger point on the narrative. It is fundamentally important that we not only change how we talk about international development, but drop the word "international", because that makes it sound as though it is just about other people, as opposed to global development and co-development—another approach and another narrative that indicates that we are in this together, that it is not a zero-sum game and that supporting our partners is also supporting us.

4.42 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB): My Lords, we have heard from many champions of human rights and international development today, but one we will not hear from is Lord Joffe. He will be missed and long remembered.

However many tragedies beset us in this country—and we have had enough of them in the past few weeks—they will not diminish our concern for suffering overseas, in Syria, South Sudan and other parts of the world. Indeed, we are reminded by recent tragedies that discrimination, overcrowding and lack of housing in this country are directly related to poverty among refugees and migrants desperate to make a new home. These are immense, interrelated problems, and we cannot assume that Brexit will make them go away through additional border controls. As is often said, this country has a long tradition of providing a refuge for persecuted minorities. It will go on doing this, and it will benefit from migration.

At the same time, this Government must work still harder to resolve crises abroad that are the cause of such persecution. One of the most important channels is through our overseas aid programme. The Queen's Speech may not satisfy pro-Europeans, but it contains important passages about aid. It reiterates the Government's commitment to the 0.7%, as has been said, and reinforces efforts to improve the UK's ability to tackle mass migration, alleviate poverty and end modern slavery. It also, in defiance of President Trump, restates their support for the Paris agreement on climate change, which affects many of the poorest countries more than others.

I have also been encouraged by the support for international development to be found in this House—it is a good deal stronger than when I came here 22 years ago. When the Cameron-Clegg coalition was formed and we passed the 0.7% Act, it was a precise measurement of public feeling at that time, even though some Conservatives still had misgivings about it. We recognised that the world had become much more interconnected.

The word “globalisation” may be overused, but the world is smaller in the sense that we now feel the effects in other countries much more intimately, perhaps because of improved communications.

I have not noticed any compassion fatigue in spite of the huge range of world problems and humanitarian disasters. A recent indication of this was the success of the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal for East Africa, which topped £50 million in April. That was all through voluntary effort. Aid is put to good use, as the noble Earl, Lord Howe, said, and the noble Lords, Lord Purvis, Lord Polak and Lord Crisp, have all given demonstrations of that.

Nevertheless, we hear voices of people—especially from UKIP, but not entirely—who have decided to set their faces against aid. Some of these are undoubtedly people who distrust any foreigners living beyond Calais. However, many others, including those who voted for Brexit, would simply prefer to spend more on the NHS, schools and housing and less on people abroad. That is a perfectly tenable view. At the same time, tackling mass migration does not mean building walls and frontiers but sensitive aid and diplomatic policies of the kind the noble Lord, Lord Howell, is always speaking about, which focus on countries such as Libya and Syria, where migrants congregate and terrorism can flourish.

Most of us now accept that aid is not simply money given away but money invested in a safer, more stable environment in other countries which will bring rewards back home. The concept of soft diplomacy is just one example of the wider uses of our development aid. The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, spoke powerfully about students. New evidence has recently come from the Overseas Development Institute that aid is helping us directly in this country. ODI research has demonstrated how, in 2014, our direct bilateral development generated an increase in UK exports of over £2 for every £10 of aid spent, increasing trade revenue and providing an estimated 12,000 extra UK jobs.

I welcome the growing co-operation there has been between DfID and other departments, notably the FCO and MoD, through the Conflict Pool and other similar funds. There have been rumours in the press that DfID may lose its independence. The Minister has already been asked but perhaps he could say something about this and confirm there will be no merging of departments.

The International Development Committee had launched an inquiry just before the election into the future of our £1.3 billion spent through the EU in development aid. We must hope that this inquiry will be revived once the committee has been reappointed. There are many successful EU programmes that we will want to continue, including our programmes under the common security and defence policy. Beyond 2019, we will still want to maintain close co-operation with the EU on peacekeeping and humanitarian aid in Africa. The noble Lord, Lord Balfe, has already mentioned Operation Sophia.

Knowing of the Foreign Secretary's interest in eastern Europe, perhaps the Minister will confirm that, whatever happens, we will stand by our partners in the Balkans, remembering that not long ago we were one of the

principal advocates of enlargement. If we are to leave a spare place at the table, there will surely be more space for new candidates and we should continue to support that even beyond the time we are members.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, has already mentioned EPAs, the economic partnership agreements. In the Brexit negotiations, trade will inevitably take centre stage and DfID can again be expected to play a role in helping developing countries to adjust. EPAs are the EU's less-than-generous trade offers to former colonies associated with member states, coaxing them into regional groups to preserve their preferential access to Europe. As this has to be a reciprocal arrangement, it can work against middle-income countries because it threatens their new industries with competition. The poorest countries, or the LDCs, are not so affected as they are protected by the Everything but Arms agreement.

This is a complicated subject and it is really for another debate. I simply wish to make the point that unless Brexit provides the opportunity for the UK to improve on these agreements, it will continue, along with the EU, to fail to protect countries from competition, which could return them to their old status of primary producers of raw materials and minerals. However, I will put this down for another day.

4.50 pm

Lord Suri (Con): My Lords, before I get into the substance of my speech, I want to pay a brief tribute to the Queen. For more than 65 years, she has reigned with extraordinary dignity and reserve, and I am grateful that she continues to serve with distinction as the Head of the Commonwealth. I am even more grateful that she missed Royal Ascot to speak in this place yesterday, although given the heat outside, maybe it was a near miss.

Our foreign and defence policy is more closely connected to Brexit than some may think. Despite the formal lack of integration on a common defence policy, our European friends and allies are our closest partners, and our foreign policy is also shaped around that understanding. Primarily, I wish to focus on the situation in central Europe and our contribution going forward. Previously, I welcomed the Government's decision to station more troops in and work more closely with nations such as Poland. We all know that Russia has been emboldened by western weakness, and the new inaction of the White House has since added to that impression of stagnation.

We must keep and strengthen our retaliatory tools, as Russia continues to harass, hack and bully the Balkans and others in the region. The primary European retaliation has been based around strengthening relations with nations such as Ukraine and putting up sanctions to hurt the Russian economy. I tend to favour targeted sanctions rather than general tariff-based versions, because the aim must be to deprive the liberty of those in power and not of their subjects. Making ordinary citizens poorer is not useful in any case, and shores up support for the regime.

I must confess that I am worried about how the Government are factoring our sanctions policy into Brexit. We are consistently the strongest advocate in the Council and the Commission. Our stellar teams in

[LORD SURI]

the Treasury, Foreign Office and Department for International Trade are globally recognised as experts in targeted sanctions and do a significant portion of the heavy lifting for the EU when it comes to this. Without our clout and expertise in the room, it will be far easier for other states to say that they lack the will or capabilities to continue, and a crucial plank of our foreign policy will be cleanly chopped away, as acting alone rather than with allies weakens our position. I have heard Ministers time and again say that they want a deep and close relationship with the EU once we leave.

Now that negotiations have started in full, it is time to make a unilateral declaration that we will support and uphold existing sanctions policy, come rain or shine. More generally, in light of the disappointing election results, Ministers should start to tone down some of the more contentious aspects of Brexit and start listening more closely to Parliament.

It is not often that I agree with those sitting across the Chamber from me but the Labour Party made a good point during the election campaign. Trident is of course critical for our stature and safety, and I have defended it in the past in this place. Yet the cybersecurity of this country has great scope for improvement. As recent events showed, cyber and digital attacks are moving to the stage of being as dangerous as conventional weaponry. Without conventional weapons we might not be able to eliminate targets but when the WannaCry hackers can seriously damage the ability of the NHS to heal our sick we should consider our priorities. *National Cyber Security Strategy 2016 to 2021* makes for interesting reading and I hope the departure of the former Minister for the Cabinet Office from government and Parliament will not lead to a loss of focus.

One issue I had was with funding. The 2015 strategic defence review set aside £1.9 billion over five years. Whether that is still the case is unclear but it is not clear that £380 million will be adequate to put through the ambitious reforms and progress initially envisaged, especially given the increasing demand for such services after recent attacks. Within the ring-fenced defence budget, I would be glad to see Ministers with cybersecurity responsibility and Defence Ministers come to an arrangement to increase the funds available for the strategy should stakeholders think it necessary. That would be a wise investment, a hedge against the new warfare. Also, from an economic standpoint, we should support our industries most likely to thrive after Brexit. Cybersecurity is something both that the UK is good at and that pays well. I will of course support the Government on the Queen's Speech.

4.57 pm

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke (Lab): My Lords, I join others in welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, back to his position and his new role. I am delighted to see the noble Earl, Lord Howe, in his place. It cheered me up to see that we have two Ministers so respected in the House because I was greatly disheartened by a sketch in this morning's *Financial Times* which talks about a country diminished, using the reduced pomp and circumstance of yesterday as a peg to discuss the extent to which we seem to be reducing the values of

our society. I was delighted to hear the most reverend Primate refer to values—as indeed did my noble friend Lord Alli and the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, who are not in their places at the moment. In essence, when we look at our foreign responsibilities, and at the leadership we have shown in the world in the past, we must remind ourselves that we set examples that have been to the good. Now we seem to be setting examples that do not show Britain in the best light.

I was delighted to hear the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, refer to Lord Joffe. He was a man who not only had values but lived by them as the lawyer to Nelson Mandela. We need to remind ourselves that that is the history of this place and of this House.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Howell, I am rather surprised that the Brexit debate is on a different day from this debate on foreign affairs, defence and international development. Perhaps it is because in the past European matters have been quasi-domestic. We have talked about them as part of our domestic policy because they have had an impact on domestic policy. But how we handle the Brexit issues and how the rest of the world sees us handling the Brexit issues will have a real impact on how our foreign policy is perceived.

I was greatly disappointed to see the invocation of Article 50 in March. Then a general election was called. As a consequence, we lost three vital months in a tight two-year period. There are many more distinguished negotiators in this House than I, but I spent a stint negotiating. One of my greatest achievements was the definition of “industrial jam”. My heart throbs every time I walk past a jammie dodger. It took a solid year to negotiate that we could have industrial jam with no fruit in it. What is it going to be like when we have to deal with the challenge of the EU budget?

I sat on the EU Financial Affairs Sub-Committee which looked at the EU budget. I thought I knew about the budget, having sat on and chaired the budget council, but I realised how good my civil servants were. The EU budget is complicated. I had not realised quite how complicated until the committee started that piece of work. One thing that really surprised me and, I think, every last one of us was the view of the lawyers that we were not liable for any exit bill, or it could be argued that we were not liable for any exit bill at the end of the Brexit process. I have to be honest: that absolutely horrified me. How can we hold up our head in the world if we run away from our moral responsibilities? As I say, the EU budget is complicated. There is the multiannual financial framework. There are also the agreements that we have entered into, called *reste à liquider*—the payments still to be made for the various projects. If we do not pay our share, poorer countries than ours—countries struggling to get themselves on a pathway to growth, having come out of non-democratic systems—will have to pick up that bill.

We will be judged on the rhetoric that we have used in this process. I say to your Lordships that a lot of that rhetoric has not shown us in the best light. There has been a sense of machismo—a machismo that is gender-free because it is not just the men who have

been using it. As we seek to negotiate trade agreements with other countries, we will be judged on how we handle this process of exit.

Negotiations are not easy. I very much agreed with the noble Lord, Lord Sterling, when he said that we should be seeking not a deal but an agreement. It is working towards agreement that is important. If you enter into a negotiation, you need a clear vision of what you want. You also have to have a clear understanding and appreciation of what the other side wants. In that way, you can find a way forward. But you will not find a way forward if you sacrifice trust, and we have sacrificed trust with the name-calling of the people who we are going to be turning to in a few months' time to try to negotiate future trade agreements.

We have heard all the slogans, such as "Brexit means Brexit". We have heard all the carefully crafted phrases about no deal being better than a bad deal. We should be seeking a consensus as we move forward. To be honest, I would rather the whole concept of Brexit disappeared. In 1974 I was against the Common Market, but I have seen the benefits of it and I have seen my children benefit from it. I accept the situation that we find ourselves in but we must try to find a way to move ahead that does not make enemies of people who should be our friends.

In the report that the EU Committee brought out there is a very important phrase—that the price of future market access on favourable terms would be impossible without reaching agreement on the budget. We need some idea of where the Government are coming from on issues such as the budget. We do not have a clue, but we need to know where we are headed to before we, as a revising and analysing Chamber, can judge where all our processes are taking us. It is not too late to rectify that.

We have just passed the anniversary of the death of Jo Cox. She is the one who said that there is more that unites us than divides us. This is a time for all of us to put country before party. But we can do that only if those in the driving seat allow us to participate. There are many in this House who are extremely distinguished, with a huge amount of experience and—another important element—contacts and networks throughout the European Union, and they could help in this. I plead with the Government to put country before party and give us the opportunity to turn away from the disheartening analysis of a country that is diminished. We need not be diminished, but we have to have courage to know that we have to work together.

5.06 pm

Lord Sharkey (LD): My Lords, I declare an interest as a co-chair of the APPG for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. I follow other noble Lords in welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his new post.

In six days' time, negotiations resume in Geneva on the reunification of Cyprus. Many observers and participants see this as the final chance for a settlement. There have been 40 years of discussions and negotiations prior to this; all have failed. In those 40 years, the people of north Cyprus have been greatly disadvantaged. They have been under an embargo for all that time, which means little foreign investment, little direct trade

and no direct flights. GDP per capita in the north is now half of that in the south. In practice, the north is an economic dependency of Turkey. That is unhelpful. It threatens the identity of the community in the north, impoverishes their people and is unsustainable. We should all hope that the current negotiations will succeed, that the island will be reunited and the embargo lifted, and that the settlement will provide much-needed economic growth in all parts of the island. Without a settlement, for example, it may not be possible at all to develop the oil and gas fields in Cyprus's territorial waters, to the great disadvantage of all Cypriots.

The United Kingdom is a guarantor power and will have a seat at the Geneva conference. I know that the Government greatly desire a settlement to end the division of the island and that they agree with Kofi Annan's comment after the failure of the 2004 attempt at unification that a settlement to the long-standing Cyprus problem,

"would benefit the people of Cyprus, as well as the region and the wider international community".

This was true when he said it in 2004; it is even truer in 2017, as stability and peace have declined dramatically across the whole of the eastern Mediterranean region. I know that the FCO is working hard to assist the negotiating parties. Here, I acknowledge in particular the efforts of Sir Alan Duncan in this regard. It is right that we work hard to facilitate a settlement and equally right that any such settlement has to be by Cypriots, for Cypriots. The United Kingdom has a legal and moral duty to help and to continue to help. Our legal duty arises from our guarantor status; our moral duty arises from our catastrophic error in allowing a divided island to join the EU. Jack Straw, who was instrumental in this decision, now openly acknowledges his mistake.

At the time, the EU promised by way of compensation an end to the embargo and other relaxations. Kofi Annan said, after the rejection by the Greek Cypriots of his plan for reunification in 2004, that he regretted that the Turkish Cypriots would not equally enjoy the benefits of EU membership but hoped that ways would be found to ease the plight in which those people find themselves through no fault of their own. That was 13 years ago, and no ways were found—none. The embargo remains in force and the EU has not delivered on any of its promises.

The current Geneva talks are, realistically, the last chance to put things right, and I urge the Government to continue their efforts to help, but we must recognise that the talks may fail—they have failed before—and there is a very short window available for compromise before elections in the south will dominate political discourse there. There are already signs that this is happening. There are already fears in the north that the Greek Cypriots are no longer really committed to reunification on the basis of political equality. If the talks fail, we must recognise that they are unlikely to be resumed for decades, if at all, and because that is true, Her Majesty's Government must look to other ways of discharging their legal and moral responsibilities. They must have a plan to support the people of the north if the talks fail. In particular, Her Majesty's Government must be prepared to help bring about an end to the embargo. They must encourage inward financial investment, they must help integrate the Northern

[LORD SHARKEY]

Cyprus financial institutions into international systems and, in particular, they must allow direct flights into and from Northern Cyprus.

Direct flights are crucial to the economic sustainability of the north. At present, all flights to and from the UK to Northern Cyprus must first land in Turkey. This adds time and cost. Since 1 June, action by HMG has added more time and more cost to these flights. Since 1 June, flights between the UK and Northern Cyprus must not only touch down in Turkey but require an additional security check in Turkey and a change of planes. The Government explain this additional requirement as a necessary security measure because they have “no visibility” of security at Ercan airport, the airport in Lefkoşa in Northern Cyprus. This does not explain why these additional security checks are required on outbound flights from the UK to Ercan; it explains only why the additional checks are required on flights inbound to the UK from Ercan.

I entirely understand that it is the duty of the UK authorities to take whatever measures seem to them necessary to protect the public and that while they have no visibility of security at Ercan outbound measures are justifiable, but I hope that these measures will remain in place for only as long as it takes the UK authorities to acquire visibility and satisfy themselves that Ercan airport security meets the required standards. There is no legal obstacle to doing that. There is no legal obstacle to UK authorities visiting, communicating and agreeing protocols with Ercan, particularly in light of the High Court ruling of 3 February this year that law enforcement officers of the UK and north Cyprus can collaborate on criminal matters. Will the Minister and the Department for Transport look urgently at this situation? Why are the additional inbound to Ercan security measures necessary? Are we working to acquire visibility of security at Ercan so that we can reinstate the previous flight rules when it is safe to do so? We should surely minimise the economic damage to north Cyprus as much as we can. Will the Minister say whether the Government have plans to provide assistance to north Cyprus in the event of the failure of the Geneva talks?

5.14 pm

Lord Dannatt (CB): My Lords, in the quite extraordinary times within which we are currently living—both in terms of our external security and our internal security, well described by my noble and gallant friend Lord Stirrup earlier on in our debate—like other noble Lords, I was very pleased to note that Her Majesty's gracious Speech made reference to the Government's commitments to spending 2% of GDP on defence and to spending 0.7% of GDP on international development, as well as including a reference to a renewed commitment to the Armed Forces covenant and a determination to improve the provision made for mental health. I would like to make five points arising from those references.

First, there is the commitment to 2% of GDP being spent on defence, or more specifically the commitment in the gracious Speech to spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. I assume that this was deliberate drafting and indicated the welcome intent to increase our spending on defence. I am not alone in believing that an increase

in our defence budget, and a renewed commitment to not just our own security but that of Europe, would be an important signal to our European friends that, although we are leaving the EU, we are not walking away from playing our full part in European security but, within the context of NATO, are prepared to play an even greater part. Our Armed Forces are the benchmark for armed forces within Europe, and an increase in spending on defence would be welcomed in Europe and by our principal ally, the United States.

Furthermore, the reversal of the decision to withdraw all our troops from Germany—a decision which seemed right at the time and one that I supported then—would send a strong message from Brexit Britain to our friends and foes alike. Retaining the armoured infantry brigade in the well-found garrison of Sennelager and Paderborn would substantiate that message and have the side benefit of removing the necessity of rehousing that brigade within the UK, at least in the short to medium term, a move for which it is a challenge to find adequate funds and which would be the potential cause of an unacceptably high concentration of armoured vehicles around Salisbury Plain.

Secondly, I draw attention to the relationship between our defence budget and our spending on international development. Some might characterise this as our spending on hard power and soft power respectively, but I believe such characterisation misses the point. If the short-hand précis of our foreign, defence and security objectives is for the United Kingdom to exercise beneficial influence around the world, then the way to maximise this is the complete integration of our diplomatic, defence and development capabilities. Currently, such integration, although much talked about, is not fully practised, notwithstanding the double-hatting of the right honourable Alistair Burt in the present Government. A few years ago, I was staying with our high commissioner in Rwanda, and he remarked with exasperation that the UK had two foreign policies in that country: one run by him and the other by the senior DfID official in the country. Of course, it was the DfID policy that prevailed, as it had the money, as the noble Lord, Lord Polak, informed us earlier on in our debate. I know there is a danger of formulating policy based on anecdote, but how much more effective would our influence be if our diplomatic, defence and development capabilities and policies were fully integrated—even to the extent of allowing elements of the sizeable international development budget to be spent on diplomatic, defence or security matters where a particular situation demanded that response? That would be truly beneficial integration.

Thirdly, I welcome the reference to the Armed Forces covenant in the gracious Speech, coming as it does in Armed Forces Week. We all recognise that the Armed Forces covenant remains, almost by definition, work in progress, as illustrated by the tabling of the annual report to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence in association with the other delivery departments. But I continue to wonder whether our governmental structure is right to do the best for our veteran community of some 6 million people. The Veterans Minister is to be found within the Ministry of Defence, but apart from the administration of pensions, the MoD has little to do with veterans: its focus is

quite properly on the current serving population and the defence capability that is delivered by those uniformed serving individuals. The needs of the veteran community are predominantly met by other government departments, which focus on health, housing, education and social welfare. Is there therefore not a case for the Veterans Minister to be found, not in the MoD, but in the Cabinet Office, where a more cross-cutting and co-ordinating function could be exercised? I urge the Government to consider that possibility. The recently announced Veterans Board in the Cabinet Office is a step in the right direction, but I am not sure it goes far enough.

Fourthly, I noted with approval in the gracious Speech the reference to mental health and the intention to ensure that it is prioritised in the National Health Service in England. Detailed discussion of that is for another day in this debate, but in the context of the Armed Forces covenant I wish to raise one issue: the provision of emergency out-of-hours mental health cover for serving Armed Forces personnel. The current policy for serving Armed Forces personnel who are suffering an acute mental health event is that they should go to their nearest NHS A&E department or ring the Combat Stress helpline. I have been contacted several times by serving or recently discharged personnel who believe that this policy is wrong—lives of young people have been lost—and that there should be a dedicated MoD helpline to which those in need can turn. I make no criticism of the Combat Stress helpline, but I question whether serving Armed Forces personnel should have to resort to a charity helpline. I have raised this matter previously with MoD Ministers, as has Dr Julian Lewis, chairman of the Defence Select Committee, with the Secretary of State for Defence. We owe a duty of care to all our serving and veteran Armed Forces personnel, but I question whether the MoD is fully discharging that duty to those who are still serving, but suffering from mental health illness, by requiring them to ring a charity helpline.

My final point relates to our serving soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, the very people who are at the heart of our defence capability. Frankly, there are just not enough of them. We have cut the size of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force too far. In the 2010 SDSR, the Treasury demanded a 7% cut in the defence budget, which led to a 20% cut in the size of the Regular Army and necessitated a major reorganisation of it. At the height of our interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army and Royal Marines together were able to field 10 combat brigades, with five each going around the two operational cycles. The 2010 reorganisation took the Army down to six brigades, only three of which are at relatively high readiness. The net result is that in future we would have the manpower for only one extended intervention. The maths do not add up—a 7% cut in the defence budget leading to a 20% cut in the size of the Army resulting in a 50% reduction in our operational capability. There may be no appetite to put British boots on the ground in the short term, but somewhere, some day, there will be a non-discretionary set of circumstances that will demand a major deployment of British troops. Like the concerns expressed by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, about the numbers of aircraft, and those

expressed by the noble Lord, Lord West, about the numbers of frigates and destroyers, I worry about the number of soldiers that we have—or, particularly, do not have. We are carrying too much risk. The last Government from 2010 and this present Government might get away with it, but the future will catch us out at some point and the verdict of history will be damning.

5.23 pm

Lord Loomba (Non-Aff): My Lords, I convey my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, on his well-deserved promotion to Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I welcome Her Majesty's gracious Speech and the opportunity to speak on international development in this debate. I am pleased to see the Government's continuing commitment to spending 0.7% of our gross national income on international development. I look forward to working with the Minister and the Department for International Development to enable our common goal of alleviating poverty and assisting some of the poorest in the world to achieve better living standards and a life free from human rights abuses.

As we speak today about international development and the importance of helping those whose lives are blighted by poverty and injustice, I note that it is a particularly poignant time for me as it is now 20 years since I, along with my wife, Lady Loomba, established the Loomba Foundation, a charity that helps poor widows, starting in India and then spreading to more and more countries across the developing world where help was needed. From Mumbai to Mombasa, from Kigali to Chile, the lives of many thousands of widows and children have been transformed over the years through educational and skills-based projects.

Here, as well as declaring an interest as founder and chairman of the foundation, I will also thank the many noble Lords for the interest they have shown, the support they have given and the wise words they have spoken over the past 20 years, which have helped to bring to fruition many of the projects that have assisted widows and their children.

Since I began my humanitarian work, many things have changed and improved, but still there is a need for much more to be done. The SDGs have paved the way for progress to be accelerated and for the many poor and suffering people in this world to be helped, and it is incumbent on this Government to ensure that the promised 0.7% of GNI for the aid budget is spent wisely, used carefully, targeted correctly and prioritised properly, so that it is not wasted but reaches those most in need of it. Spending in alignment with the SDGs will go some way towards ensuring that aid gets to where it is needed most.

The importance of getting it right cannot be overstated, as shown by the EU when it marked World Refugee Day on Tuesday of this week and said that,

“around the world more than 65 million people are forced to leave their homes due to conflicts and violence, natural disasters or the very real consequences of climate change. These are 65 million lives, 65 million different stories”.

Every one of these people is in need, and if we are not spending aid properly we are creating more injustices and even greater inequalities, and heaping more suffering on the very people who need help the most.

[LORD LOOMBA]

Today is also a particularly important day for me for a second reason in the context of my humanitarian work, as it is the eve of International Widows' Day—and I am sure many noble Lords are aware of its importance in helping Governments, NGOs, citizens of the world and ordinary people to focus their minds on the injustices and human rights abuses that still go on today against widows, who through no fault of their own suffer human rights abuses on a global scale. As World Refugee Day shows, these days serve a useful purpose in making stakeholders take note of the importance of not underestimating the need for aid and not forgetting who it is meant for—and, while the focus on refugees and widows plays out on the international stage, it is incumbent on this House to ensure that we do our bit, and do it wisely.

5.29 pm

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, I was greatly struck by the speech earlier today by my noble friend Lord Alton of Liverpool, who spoke with great strength and much relevant detail. I urge the Government to respond as fully as possible.

I start by suggesting that Britain should remain the friend of small countries. This is true for the six nations in south-east Europe referred to by my noble friend Lord Sandwich, which are not yet members of the EU. It is equally true in the Middle East of countries with democratic institutions such as Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan; they all deserve our support through intelligent tourism, investment and aid. The last two factors should be designed to give skills to the workforce and increase employment. They should benefit both local people and refugees or migrants. Refugees should now be seen as assets and not just as liabilities; stagnation, like that which unfortunately affects so many Palestinians, should above all be prevented. In Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, we should strive for fair and equal treatment for non-Muslims who happen to be refugees or internally displaced. At home we should improve our systems to help unaccompanied children, particularly those in Europe, to join close relatives already here, in the spirit of the amendment accepted from the noble Lord, Lord Dubs.

I follow on from what my noble friend Lady Cox said about Syria. It is high time to admit that all combatants have committed atrocities. The so-called moderate armed opposition is largely, I believe, an illusion, since Islamist groups are better equipped and paid. Why should the present Government of Syria hand over power when it has such strong Russian support? Her Majesty's Government should heed the advice of several former British ambassadors to Damascus and restore at least some level of British representation, as has been done, eventually, but successfully, in the case of Tehran. They should also end their complete boycott of the semi-autonomous cantons of north Syria.

With Qatar and Saudi Arabia, we have strong two-way links. Some people see us as a mediator in the difficult situation between those two countries. The least we should do is explore the possibilities, perhaps in conjunction with Kuwait, as was mentioned by the noble Earl, Lord Home. Israel, Palestine and their

Arab neighbours are now out of the media spotlight, but there is at the moment no peace process or immediate prospect of one. What can be done, however, is to improve the status quo. In Gaza, that would mean a 24-hour supply of electricity, a wider fishing limit and freer movement for people and goods. Anything that can be done to improve the local economy of east Jerusalem and the West Bank will help to reduce bitterness and violence; the Bedouin should be treated as full citizens, whether they live inside Israel or in the occupied territories. Constructive improvements of the kind that I have mentioned could create a better atmosphere for negotiations between somewhat unequal partners. This is perhaps understood by Saudi Arabia and others where there are already thoughts of restoring commercial relations with a former enemy. Detente could pave the way for a permanent peace.

I cannot conclude without referring to Europe. We should see that whole continent as a work in progress, still far from complete. For ourselves, we must not turn our back on our own neighbourhood. Whatever may be the outcome of EU negotiations, it is essential that we have a constructive relationship with all the European institutions, including, of course, the EU, as we already do with NATO. This will be vital to Gibraltar, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as for ourselves. Statesmanship of the highest order will be needed to restore devolved power-sharing in Northern Ireland and to ensure smooth north-south relations.

I look forward to the Government's reply.

5.35 pm

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, it is an honour to follow so many eminent noble Lords, but by this point I fear that many issues have already been raised, so I hope noble Lords will forgive me if I repeat some points.

Recent tragedies at home echo the instability that continues to rage across much of the world. It is therefore more important than ever that the UK safeguards national security as well as promotes global peace. Conflict today is no longer contained by national or even regional borders, and the lines between war and peace have become blurred, with western democracy threatened by terrorism on an increasingly regular basis. Globally, 20 million people are in danger of starvation: desperate people do desperate things.

While not the independent military power that we once were, we still exercise significant levers of soft power, and by aligning foreign policy with defence and development and a permanent seat on the Security Council, we continue to have influence across the world.

Monday was the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Sexual violence today is used as a weapon of war and is a heinous crime that destroys the lives of individuals, families and entire communities. The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative has impacted around the world. I congratulate my noble friend Lady Anelay on all her work while special representative and welcome my noble friend Lord Ahmad to this role. I look forward to working with him.

We have made significant progress but there is still much more to do. The current focus on combating stigma—which prevents victims coming forward for help, forcing them into a life of shame—will help shift the burden of guilt from victims to perpetrators. Importantly, this initiative has shone a light on the lack of rights for women in so many countries.

In conflict countries, women are disproportionately affected and their voices are disregarded. Peace and stability cannot be achieved if half the population are ignored. The UK is a world leader on the women, peace and security agenda and has an important role to play globally in promoting the role of women in decision-making, enabling them to participate meaningfully in building and restoring peace, including as mediators and wider community leaders.

The UK is currently working on its new national action plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325. I commend the team at the Foreign Office for all the hard work that it is putting into this and for its extensive consultation with civil society both here and across the world. It is by us all working together that we will achieve the best results. I hope that the new NAP will be forward-looking and a role model for other countries. Tackling violence against women also needs to remain a priority, as one in three women across the world still suffers from violence.

For the past two years, I have been a member of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme and have seen at first hand the commitment of our Armed Forces. Their professionalism, discipline and courage are frankly humbling. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. We have a duty of care to all those who have put themselves forward to do what is at times a difficult and dangerous job. This includes provision for the future welfare of those who have served their country, particularly with regard to mental health—I echo the words of the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, about help for mental health—and we need to help those who have served integrate back into community life post-discharge. We also must make sure that we are doing enough to care for military families, and we must make sure that the military covenant addresses the needs of both regulars and reservists. Our Armed Forces not only defend our country but undertake wider defence engagement across the world. This includes supporting upstream conflict prevention and developing the military capacities of partner countries. In their own words, they,

“prepare for conflict whilst strengthening peace abroad”.

Recently in Kabul, I visited the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, set up by the UK and modelled on Sandhurst, where British troops help Afghan instructors to train their own cadets. I met some of the women cadets who were training; it takes enormous courage to come forward for military service as a woman in that culture, but many were applying. It affirmed for me what a huge difference our British military are making, both here and in other countries where they train domestic armies, helping those countries to build their own security and resilience. Helping to build stability overseas and conflict prevention need to remain a strong focus, and perhaps more needs to be done to understand how to stabilise countries post asymmetric warfare. Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya—all

countries where we have played a role—have not achieved stability post-conflict and maybe lessons can be learned about what is needed in the transitional phase. Perhaps the UK could consider a conference at Wilton Park to address this by bringing together international military, academics, diplomats and civil servants. Above all, we need to do more to identify potential conflict upstream and proactively promote preventive measures.

While in Kabul, I met two impressive young deputy Ministers who had both attended university in the UK. It struck me that we were instrumental in the personal development of these young Afghan leaders. Can we not reach out more to those in the diasporas of conflict countries who are living here in the UK? For those who wish to return to their homeland, can we not offer to equip them with technical skills and knowledge to help them to return to rebuild institutions in their countries and spread British values?

We have all witnessed the mass migration that Europe has struggled to cope with in recent years, and the perilous journeys undertaken by those looking for refuge. Unless we help people in need, this problem will only get worse. We should be proud of our commitment to deliver 0.7% of GNI to overseas development. We are the first G8 country to enshrine it in law, and I commend the Prime Minister for so clearly reaffirming her support for this. With restrictions on civil society space in many places now, I hope we will look at ways to deliver more aid to small grass-roots organisations, as they can deliver substantial changes in their communities, and to extend more help to women's rights organisations and human rights defenders, who so often risk their lives.

We live in a dangerous world. Our diplomatic integrity, military capacity and development commitments must be harnessed to promote prosperity and human rights and to deliver global peace and security for us all.

5.42 pm

Lord Luce (CB): My Lords, I echo the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, as at this stage in the debate one feels rather mesmerised and I am intrigued to know exactly what I am going to say. Certainly I cannot speak or wind up on behalf of Cross-Benchers, because that would be a contradiction in terms.

A theme has come through the debate today: deep concern about the condition of this nation and the fragility and the uncertainty in our country. I am very glad that the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken about the need to review and think again about values in this nation. The gracious Speech referred to the need to build a more united nation and to the need to ensure that the United Kingdom plays a leading role on the world stage. But, of course, to have influence abroad we have to be strong and united at home.

One thing that has given me great inspiration and hope has been the reaction of the public to the incidents that we have faced in the last three months in Manchester and London. The reaction has been overwhelmingly moving, positive and human. Indeed, at local levels we have seen inspiring leadership that many of us would do well to follow. But the nation is fragile, uncertain and divided, and the election result reflected just that with a minority Government. That is exacerbated by

[LORD LUCE]

the uncertainty over our future role in Europe and our role in the world. The nation has been wounded, certainly, after nearly a decade of austerity. Many parts of our community have been alienated and are worried about their future.

As a student back in the late 1950s, I was very fortunate to meet Dean Acheson, who had been Secretary of State in the United States. His famous words were:

"Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role".

However, like many other people I had thought that perhaps when we eventually joined the European Union we would begin to find a new role in the world. But somehow after the war our minds were on our desperate economy and our preoccupation still with the Empire, and in the 1950s we failed to take an interest in the European Union. We took a long time, until the 1970s, to commit ourselves. Despite many individuals who have been deeply committed to the European Union, it seems to me that as a nation we have been a reluctant and half-hearted participant in it. Thus, we have not been able to influence the way in which the European Union has evolved and the way in which it has become more and more bureaucratic. Whatever happens in the next two years, we need a strong relationship with Europe. I want to be convinced that whatever the outcome is it will bring us greater prosperity and security and more influence in the world if it is to be of any value at all.

It is totally wrong to say that in the post-war years we have not had considerable influence on stability in the world. We have shown considerable skill in the way in which we have dismantled our empire. This country has been a member of the largest number of institutions—more than any other country in the world. We have retained much good will and our humanitarian work has been effective. But now we face a powder keg in the Middle East. Incidentally, the excellent report by the Select Committee led by the noble Lord, Lord Howell, should be debated separately before the Recess. We are sitting on a powder keg that could easily blow up at any moment because of the proxy wars in Syria and other parts of the Middle East.

The United States has a dangerously unpredictable President. Our relationship with the people of the United States is a natural one, as I see it. It is not a special relationship; it is a natural relationship. Our job is not to fawn to the President but steadily to give our views as a Government to those in the Administration who are prepared to listen to us.

Back in the 1980s, when I was Minister in attendance on a state visit to Jordan, King Hussein asked me to take a message to Glubb Pasha, who he had sacked as head of the Arab Legion. I had never met Glubb Pasha before, but I discovered that he was a classical scholar who had studied the history of empires over the last 3,000 years: the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Greek Empire and, of course, the British Empire. What I found intriguing about this was the common strands that featured in every empire, starting with the setting out of pioneers and conquerors and leading to commerce and more affluence. But afterwards, in the period of decadence and decline, the empires

became more defensive, pessimistic and materialistic, with more flippancy in public life and a weakening of religion, to give some examples.

After long periods of wealth and power, they displayed more selfishness and love of money and a loss of a sense of duty. It is worth reflecting on our experience in the post-war years and on the need from time to time—now is a good time—to think about what we owe in public service, to renew our sense of duty and service, integrity, and humility but also humour in our life, and to be more tolerant in our public debates and less coarse than we have been in recent times. We must realise that populism is about trying to suggest that there are simple answers to what are complex problems, and that it is the job of political leaders to lead our way out of those grey areas of complexity.

The most remarkable thing about our empire, distinct from others, is that no other empire led to the Commonwealth of Nations that we have today. Arnold Smith, its very first Secretary-General, said in 1981:

"100 years from now, I suggest, historians will consider the Commonwealth the greatest of all Britain's contributions to man's social and political history".

We have quite a long way to go yet to achieve that. However, I end my remarks by saying that I am very glad that the gracious Speech highlighted the importance of the Commonwealth, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, on his new responsibilities for the Commonwealth, and I suggest that we have a golden opportunity to take a prominent lead as equal partners in the Commonwealth as we come to the summit in London next spring. I am glad that the Prime Minister is strongly committed and that she has set up a unit under Tim Hitchens, a distinguished diplomat, to work out advice as to the leadership we should give.

We must look for a coherent approach to the Commonwealth that will bring mutual benefits to all members, not just to the United Kingdom. Here, I hope that India will be persuaded to play a more prominent role than she has been able to play in past years, bearing in mind that it was in fact Nehru who led to the successful progress of the Commonwealth by urging that the Queen be made Head of the Commonwealth. There is a lot of work to do, but for my part I hope very strongly that one of our big priorities will be youth in the Commonwealth, both in this country and around the Commonwealth. This is something inspiring that we can work for while the Brexit negotiations are going on.

5.52 pm

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Luce, that it is a daunting task to sum up a debate with so many contributions which range, literally, over the whole globe—and indeed I will have to cherry pick. I would also like to confirm two things. First, understandably, because of everything that has happened in the last few weeks, the mood of the House is sombre. Indeed, in his opening speech, the noble Earl, Lord Howe, talked about a darkening international situation which we have to confront. Secondly, I echo what many noble Lords said about how welcome it is to see the noble Earl, Lord Howe, opening the debate and the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, replying to it in his new role—we look forward to

hearing from him. We are very pleased to have two Ministers who engage so well with the House. In his opening remarks the noble Earl, Lord Howe, also said that the commitment to spending 2% on defence and 0.7% on development assistance is a crucial part of how we might address this darkening atmosphere, and I think he was right to say so. Most of my remarks will focus on international development-related issues, although there are a couple of other things as well.

The noble Earl mentioned the strengthening capacity of our international trade department. I would simply say that I think we should all be fairly cautious on two grounds. First, we keep telling ourselves that we are a great trading nation. However, the trade seems to be more in one direction than the other. We have a historically huge balance of payments deficit. That has not happened because we are a member of the European Union, because other members of the European Union have managed to operate within the Union and create a surplus. The reality is that we are a nation of small businesses, and exporting is difficult and challenging unless there is a huge amount of resource and support. I therefore hope that these new people in the trade ministry will be able to give small and medium-sized businesses the practical reality to enable them to trade and export, because for many of them the risks are just too great in the present climate.

The noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, made the point that in his time in the House he has seen a welcome increase in the number of contributions and discussions on the role and importance of international development, and that has certainly been true of today's debate. The role of the Commonwealth has also featured very strongly and that is welcome.

I want to make a point about trade before I come to speak in detail about development. I happen to be the president of the Caribbean Council, which is made up of business associations promoting relationships between the UK and the Caribbean. I know from my discussions with Caribbean countries that they are really concerned about the consequences of Brexit, the implications of the loss of EPAs with the UK—if that happens—and possible trade deals that we form with countries such as Brazil and the United States, which could disadvantage them compared with their current preferential arrangements. They are seeking assurances that the United Kingdom, in its desire to get trade deals with Brazil or the United States, will not forget the needs of weaker and more vulnerable partners in the Caribbean, with whom we have traditionally had very good relationships. I think that they would want that to be put on the record.

I have put in the register of Members' interests my connections with international development, which go back quite a long way, and I look for a number of commitments from the Minister. Having welcomed the 0.7% contribution, quite a lot of colleagues, including the noble Lord, Lord Collins, at the beginning of the debate, have also expressed concern about the Government's desire or intention to try to change the terms or definition of official development assistance. I hope that that will not happen but I also suggest to the Government that, with all the challenges of Brexit, this does not seem to be the right moment to open

discussions with other members of the OECD about how to redefine aid in a way that I think suits the Conservative Party as a majority Government but not as a minority Government. It would be good to have an assurance that aid will be spent on poverty reduction and in conformity with current agreements and our own domestic laws, which require it to be poverty focused and untied.

What will happen to our relationship as regards aid spending and our partnerships with the European Union, accounting for £1.3 billion? Again, a number of noble Lords raised this. I understand that the European Union has said that it wants this to continue. Of course, people might say, "What wouldn't they? It's 15% of their budget that they are going to lose". I get that point, but it is also true that our own multilateral review assessed our European partnerships and the European agencies as "excellent", "outstanding" or "very good". The logic of that is that we should be able to find a way of continuing to work with the European Union on development co-operation, and it would be good to hear whether the Government have a positive view about taking that forward. Obviously, there must be agreement on the broad principles that would enable that to happen.

The role of DfID—this is a term it uses itself—is a "commissioning agency" for aid and development. There is an existing partnership. I think that my noble friend Lady Sheehan and the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, mentioned the ODI report, which pointed out that the UK has a huge capacity to deliver aid through the budget provided by DfID and through the policy framework, with accountability, but it is the partnerships with a whole variety of partnering contractors—whether NGOs, private contractors, hybrid organisations or think tanks and so on—that provide real benefit to the UK and help us to be world-beaters, and it is helpful for DfID to acknowledge that.

One organisation with which I have an involvement is the Start Network—a consortium of international NGOs that deliver low-visibility humanitarian responses at a very early stage. They are there before the United Nations and other big organisations have the chance to respond. A recent example of its work was in the DRC, where there was an outbreak of Ebola. It was able to mobilise very quickly through the Alliance for International Medical Action and get people on the ground. It was able to train eight Ministry of Health staff, arrange 58 community relays for awareness and chlorination activities, brief 20 political and administrative authorities, and reach 2,726 people with health advice about how to avoid the disease. This was all done in a matter of days and in a very small number of weeks. It demonstrates what can be done with this kind of partnership. It is very substantially funded by DfID, but it is also supported by the Netherlands, Ireland, Estonia, ECHO and, soon, by Belgium. This kind of partnership is extremely valuable.

Another thing worth mentioning is that the critics of aid do not let go. I do not know how many noble Lords saw this piece in the *Daily Mail* earlier this week:

"Minister in denial over aid scandals ... Seven *Daily Mail* stories that she could not refute".

[LORD BRUCE OF BENNACHIE]

I very much welcome Priti Patel's defence of her department in the face of these criticisms and her challenge to the media, saying that most of their stories were not accurate. I do not think she needs to refute them, but I could easily pick up a couple of them.

One example the *Daily Mail* complains about is the amount of cash payments distributed through our aid budget. These programmes have been tried and tested and are the preferred and most effective mechanism for dealing with crises by most international aid donors. The *Mail* complains that recipients can spend these payments "at will" and has a picture of a queue of people at an ATM. That is of course true, but the evidence shows that people on the edge of survival prioritise food and health when they are given money. It is the most effective way of getting it. Rather than shipping US grain to Africa and paying shippers a huge amount of aid money to get it there, it is much more effective to have the money used to buy services and food locally and help the local economy. I suspect that the *Daily Mail* probably thinks that the DWP should do this because, after all, all this money is going to feckless, undeserving poor, which seems to be the fundamental attitude of that particular organ.

The *Daily Mail* also complains that DfID has the highest-paid civil servants. It is a very small department, so I suspect it is a mean figure of £53,000 a year. However, if you are critical of aid being spent in difficult and challenging environments, would you not want highly paid civil servants to make sure that it is well spent? I am glad to say, as the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury said, that DfID staff work hard and with huge dedication around the world. They are indeed recognised as having done so, in very difficult and anti-social circumstances and conditions.

This has been a debate in the context of Brexit, which will be discussed at the end of next week, but also of our struggling to redefine our relationship with the rest of the world. An awful lot will have to happen in the next two to three years before that becomes clear, but one thing that has united the House is that we have something to be proud of in our international engagement, our commitment to 0.7%, our strong defence capacity and a recognition that we have to be engaged with the world and not turn our back on it. That is the flavour that has come out of the debate.

6.02 pm

Lord Tuhig (Lab): My Lords, I begin by joining other noble Lords in welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, to his post—I wish him well. I have a number of questions relating to defence and I will fully understand if he wants to reflect on those and write to me, rather than answer them this evening. I also welcome the reappointment of the noble Earl, Lord Howe, to defence. He has often come to this House to defend the Government in difficult times, but more than that I want to thank him for arranging the regular briefings for Peers at the Ministry of Defence. We all find them very helpful, and my one regret is that I never thought of that idea when I was a Minister in the department.

Once again, this debate has shown the House at its best. Well-informed contributions from across the Chamber underpin the value that this second Chamber brings to our democracy. Last year in this debate, I stressed the importance of considering the three key topics of foreign affairs, defence and international aid together. Our view is that Britain's foreign policy is the signpost needed to point us in the right direction for the other two, and that all three should be looked at together.

The noble Earl was quite right when he opened the debate to refer to the so-called state aggressors: a resurgent Russia; a territorially ambitious China claiming islands in the South China Sea; an unpredictable regime in North Korea; and, of course, the ongoing conflict in Syria. My noble friend Lord Collins of Highbury developed powerful arguments on the issues of foreign policy and international aid, and therefore I will concentrate my remarks on Britain's defence.

Over the past year, we have had a number of important debates in the House on defence and, to be brutally frank, the Government have had very few friends—even on their own Benches—willing to congratulate them. Indeed, I will go so far as to say that if my party in government had so run down our defence to the extent that this Government have done, the howls of protest would be deafening. It comes to something when the former head of our country's Joint Forces Command, General Sir Richard Barrons, says our Armed Forces could not defend us against a serious military attack. On his retirement last year he wrote a 10-page memo outlining his concerns to the Defence Secretary. Can the Minister shed any light on how the Defence Secretary responded?

I do not base my assessment on the poor state of our defences on the opinions of Sir Richard alone. I can go back to 2014, when Robert Gates, the former United States Defence Secretary, said:

"With the fairly substantial reductions in defence spending in Great Britain, what we're finding is that it won't have full spectrum capabilities and the ability to be a full partner",

to the United States,

"as they have been in the past".

He went on to suggest that the traditional basis of the UK/United States special relationship was under threat. That is what our friends think about us. No matter how often the Prime Minister and President Trump hold hands and she proclaims the special relationship is alive and well, I have seen nothing to suggest that Secretary Gates's assessment is challenged by the powers in Washington.

Under this Government, our Armed Forces have been cut to the bone. Time and again, concerns have been raised over Army recruitment and retention. As of May this year, we have a total trained Army of 79,540 people, which is well below the 82,000 promised in the SDSR 2015. When Labour left office, the Army's strength was 102,000.

Reports on Tuesday suggested a shortage of sailors to man the fleet had led to the early decommissioning of HMS "Torrey". Perhaps the Minister will be able to say something about this. At present, there are 29,000 trained mariners and the number is falling. Can the Minister assure the House that we will have

sufficient crew to man the first of our new aircraft carriers? Can he also say whether there is a clear strategy to deal with the lack of naval recruits? We have a Royal Navy of just 19 frigates and destroyers, six of which—the Type 45 destroyers—have propulsion problems. What progress has been made in putting this right? Key to our naval capacity is the publication of the naval shipbuilding strategy. It was due last spring; now it is midsummer. When can we expect to see it?

During Questions on 4 April, I said the whole House would be shocked if there were redundancies among the Royal Marines. As the Defence Secretary has not ruled this out, can the Minister tell us if the marines face cutbacks?

The RAF does not have any maritime patrol aircraft at a time when Russian submarine patrol activities between Scotland and Iceland have increased, and we will have no such cover until 2019. We have seven fighter squadrons, and two of these only exist by extending the life of the Typhoon until 2040, and reports in the *Times* last week claimed that our spy plane fleet would be cut from five to four because of a shortage of money. Can the Minister say whether or not this is true? Moreover, over the past year an increasing number of Russian aircraft have been intercepted close to our airspace and have been challenged by the RAF. I do not doubt the commitment of our Armed Forces, but there is a basic need to ensure that we have sufficient trained personnel, a point well made by the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt.

Turning to the SDSR 2015, it is but two years since this review and, frankly, it is unravelling with each passing day. Sources in the MoD admit that an appraisal of the SDSR is necessary in view of the military ambitions and the shortage of funding imposed by the Treasury. The 2015 SDSR demanded £9 billion in efficiency savings over the next decade. Added to this, the drop in the value of sterling following the Brexit vote makes a big difference because we buy so much of our equipment in dollars. Indeed, we have \$29 billion-worth of orders with the Americans at the moment. Before the election, there were press reports that the Prime Minister's National Security Adviser, Mr Mark Sedwill, would be conducting a 60-day review of security. Can the Minister say anything about this review? Will it be made public? Is Mr Sedwill pressing for a new SDSR? RUSI, the respected think tank, has said that a mini review of the SDSR is a distinct possibility, helping to keep defence finances on a relatively stable footing. Is this likely?

NATO remains the cornerstone of our defence. In view of the failure of President Trump to commit the United States to maintain Article 5—he could not even bring himself to say that at the NATO summit—Britain's role is ever more important. Article 5 makes it clear that an aggressive act against one NATO country is an attack on all and it is fundamental to deterrence. In my view, Article 5 is second only in importance to possessing our own independent nuclear deterrent, a deterrent that we on these Benches supported by voting to renew Trident in the other place. In order to deter, we must be able to threaten.

Britain is committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence. I do not propose to rehearse our arguments in the House about this over past months, but we are not spending anything like that in truth. Creative accounting by the Government has included civil servants' pensions in that 2%. Labour's shadow Defence Secretary, Nia Griffith, has made it clear that we believe in spending a genuine 2% of GDP on defence as a minimum. Will the Government join us in that commitment?

On 12 May, one of the most vital services in Britain, our National Health Service, was hit by a massive cyberattack which lasted for several days. In the light of that, let us consider how a hostile power using cyber could cripple Britain without firing a single shot. Across the globe, we have seen the growth of state-sponsored, aggressive cyber acts. The United States and French presidential elections come to mind. I understand that the Germans are working on additional cyber defences for their elections later this year. Brexit or no Brexit, we must continue the fullest co-operation with the European Union and our NATO partners on issues such as cybersecurity, the more so in the light of the recent terrorist attacks. Can the Minister say something about our hopes for future co-operation with the European Union on cyber and security?

On links with the European Union post Brexit, one key question is what happens to our participation in the anti-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia, a matter referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Balfe. Britain is among the world's biggest maritime trading nations—trade is our lifeblood. The anti-piracy operation is important to us. We host the HQ at Northwood and have consistently provided an operation commander for this operation. Will this continue? Can the Minister give us any information on that?

Finally, if we are to show how much we value the men and women of our Armed Forces, we have to look at their pay. Those who sign up to serve may be called on to put their lives on the line. They deserve much more than a 1% increase in pay.

We have to continue to look after our veterans, too: the men and women who have served this nation. I welcomed this week the launch of the Veterans' Gateway as a first point of contact. These men and women, both serving and retired, have risked their lives to keep us free and we owe them a debt we can never repay. We must treat them with respect.

As this debate has shown, we are not alone on this side of the House in urging the Government to invest more in Britain's defence so that our Armed Forces can continue to keep our country safe.

6.13 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, I begin by thanking all noble Lords who have taken part in this extremely diverse but expert debate on a range of issues. I also thank many noble Lords from across the House and Members of the other place for the warm reception that I have received in my new role—indeed, as we have learnt today, it is not just me who has received those felicitations but the noble Lord, Lord Alli. On behalf of both of us, I thank noble Lords for their kind and warm wishes. I should start also with a small caveat. I am some 15 hours into an

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

18-and-a-half-hour fast, so if the voice seems somewhat hoarse, I seek your Lordships' indulgence right from the outset.

I am delighted to have been given the great honour of being the new Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. As we have already heard during the debate, among my responsibilities are those of Minister for the Commonwealth. As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, so aptly put it, when I first came to your Lordships' House, I said that it was full not only of wit but of wisdom and expertise. I often joke with friends, but with a degree of seriousness, "Forget Google, I have the House of Lords". I shall certainly look towards the expertise across your Lordships' House in the wide brief I must cover at this important juncture for not just the Government but the country as whole.

Before going any further, it would be remiss of me not to pay great tribute to my predecessor, my noble friend Lady Anelay of St Johns. Joyce is a mentor in many ways. She was the Chief Whip when I first joined the Government so quite clearly I learned the ropes from her. She did some incredible work on a whole range of important issues, whether climate change, human rights or, of course, tackling sexual violence in conflict. I was delighted—I confirm this to the noble Lord, Lord Collins—to be appointed as the Prime Minister's special representative on combating and preventing sexual violence in conflict. I look forward to working with all across your Lordships' House, in particular my noble friend Lady Hodgson, on this important portfolio.

It also gives me great pleasure to close this debate on Her Majesty's gracious Speech. As we heard from noble Lords, this is a time of sombre reflection for our nation. I look towards the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is an inspiration to many of us, not just in the Chamber but across the country and to those of all faiths. I pay tribute to the personal example he has set at a time when the country needs to be brought together. I am sure that sentiment is shared by the whole House. He most poignantly reminded us that following recent tragic events we look towards ourselves and, as we go out on to the international stage, the values that bind us together.

When we talk of the issues of religious freedom and the rights of all, as the noble Lord, Lord Alli, so poignantly expressed, they are a reflection of our incredible country. We heard when talking about trade and the Commonwealth just now that perhaps India should play a bigger role. Is it not a great tribute to our country to look across your Lordships' House, or the other place, at the Government and Opposition Benches, and the Benches of all parties? We can proudly say that over the last 50, 40, 30 and 20 years, and the last decade, we have seen people of all backgrounds, faiths and communities coming forward to represent their country. Not only am I honoured, I am greatly humbled to stand in front of your Lordships' House today in my new role.

A great many points have been raised today. Of course, I will try my best in the next 20 minutes or so to cover what I can but I apologise from the start if I

am unable to answer all the points raised by noble Lords. I will endeavour to write to them and copy responses to the Library.

Several noble Lords raised the issue of the roles of the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development. The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, the noble Baroness Sheehan, and others asked whether the Government are looking to combine the two departments. The short answer is no. We are ensuring that at this important time there is greater co-ordination across Whitehall, with a greater focus on the important areas on trade and international development, but also showing the support of Britain on the world stage. That is why I am delighted that the Prime Minister created two joint Ministers of State. Alistair Burt will cover both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. He will be joined in that respect by the Minister for Africa, who will cover that brief in both departments—my honourable friend Rory Stewart.

Equally, I am delighted that my noble friends Lord Bates and Lord Howe will work with me on this important agenda as we take Britain forward at a crucial time on Brexit negotiations. Of course, it is right that my noble friend Lord Price also joins us—his is an important department as we build new relationships. As we already heard in the contribution from the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, my noble friend Lord Bates regrets that he is not here today but he is doing important work for DfID on behalf of the Government. Today, he is in Uganda for a solidarity summit for refugees.

I assure noble Lords that we will use our status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and our leading role in other multilateral institutions, together with our commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on international development, to promote peace, stability and prosperity around the world. We believe that our departure from the European Union gives us the opportunity to reset the UK's role in the world. The Government are determined to draw on all our considerable assets—our diplomatic network, our strategic and military alliances, our trading ties, our universities, our cultural heritage, our democratic institutions, and, as we have heard from the House today, our communities—to build a truly global Britain. That means reinforcing our presence and relationships in key capitals—including in Europe. I assure the noble Lords, Lord Hannay and Lord Bilimoria, among others, that that means reinvigorating our role in multilateral institutions such as the UN, the WTO and the Commonwealth, while continuing to look at a newly defined but lasting relationship with our European Union partners.

That is why, in this Session of Parliament, the Department for International Trade will introduce a trade Bill to establish the legislative framework for the UK's future trade policy outside the EU. The Department for International Trade will renew the terms of our membership of the WTO, aiming for a smooth transition that fully meets existing obligations and avoids disruption to our trading relationships. We will seek a comprehensive

free trade agreement with the EU, while preparing the ground for our new independent trading relationships around the world.

This Government believe that free and open trade in a liberal, rules-based system is vital for reducing poverty and sharing prosperity around the world. Encouraging trade and inward investment is a vital part of building a domestic economy that works for everyone, creating jobs and transforming local communities and industry. The UK is uniquely well placed to attract investment, and we are seeing results. In my previous role I signed a new air agreement with India, and others will follow.

Turning to some of the specific points that were raised in this area, I assure the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, that our exit from the European Union will be discussed in greater detail next week. The public want the Government to provide certainty and stability and to get on with the immediate job. The first round of talks earlier this week was constructive, laying solid foundations for the discussions to come. As noble Lords will be aware, my right honourable friend the Prime Minister is in Brussels this evening. There is a long road ahead but the destination is clear: a deep and special partnership, enabling prosperity for both the UK and the European Union, allowing us to protect our shared European values. I hear what the noble Baroness, Lady Liddell, among others, says about our approach to these discussions. I am sure there will be much to be had from the expertise in your Lordships' House.

Turning to the question asked by my noble friend Lord Howell of Guildford, first, I thank him for his warm welcome for the international expert, Crawford Falconer, on his appointment as Chief Trade Negotiation Adviser and Second Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Trade. My noble friend spoke of both the agreement we will reach with the European Union on exit and the vast trading opportunities that lie beyond Europe. As set out by my right honourable friend the Prime Minister, we want to achieve the greatest possible tariff- and barrier-free trade with our European neighbours, and to be able to negotiate our own trade agreements with partners across the world.

The transitional arrangements were raised by the noble Lords, Lord Purvis, Lord Anderson and Lord Bilimoria, among others. I assure the noble Lords that our exit from the European Union will be discussed next week, as I said. We want to minimise disruption as we leave the European Union and, as much as possible, give certainty to citizens in both the European Union and the UK, as well as businesses, and it is one of the Government's key principles for the upcoming negotiations. We want to avoid any cliff edges as we move from our current relationship to a future partnership, where people and businesses benefit from implementation periods to adjust to new arrangements in a smooth and orderly way.

The noble Baroness, Lady Liddell, spoke of the need to build a positive relationship with Europe and to maintain a positive and respectful rhetoric. The tone, not just the content, is important in discussions. I hear what the noble Baroness says. In this regard, I assure her that we are approaching discussions

constructively and respectfully and are confident that we can achieve outcomes that work in the interests of both sides.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, referred to the role of Parliament in reviewing trade deals. The Government are determined to secure the best trade opportunities and we will ensure that Parliament has a vital role to play in the scrutiny of the treaties, as it always does.

My noble friend Lord Balfe raised the issue of the External Action Service. As set out in the UK's EU exit White Paper:

"We want to use our tools and privileged position in international affairs to continue to work with the EU on foreign policy security and defence".

Defining the specifics of our future foreign and security policy relationship with the EU, including with the External Action Service, will be an important consideration as we leave. I stress again that the UK is seeking a deep and special security partnership with the EU, in the interests of not just the UK but the remaining members of the European Union.

The issue of international development was raised by many noble Lords, who spoke very passionately and from personal experience. I know of the personal commitment of the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, for example, in this respect. I acknowledge and warmly welcome the wide support we received for the Government's continued commitment—and the Prime Minister's personal commitment—to promote stability and economic opportunity around the world. That is why we remain committed on the 0.7% of our national income, and absolutely committed to determining that this money is spent in the most effective way. Let me assure noble Lords of that—I include within them the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, and the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, who raised various and very important issues on this agenda. The noble Lord, Lord Crisp, asked some specific questions on the health partnerships, which we have continued to support. Perhaps I may write to him in that regard. Let me assure all noble Lords that this remains a priority.

The noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, spoke about greater integration of development spending and diplomatic defence. DfID will continue to be a primary channel of UK overseas development assistance but, to respond to the changing world, more aid will be administered by other government departments, drawing on their complementary skills. This has already begun: in 2015, other departments accounted for 19.5% of ODA spending, compared with 13.8% in 2014. The noble Lords, Lord Anderson, Lord Collins and Lord Bruce, talked of changing the rules of the ODA. The UK has driven and will continue to drive reform of the official aid rules. In an ever changing world, it is right to push for more changes to ensure that the aid rules remain relevant, credible and appropriate for today's needs. I assure noble Lords that we are working closely with members of the Development Assistance Committee—by definition, a group of like-minded countries. As one of only two members of the G7 to meet the 0.7% ODA target, the UK is in a strong position to drive reform. In 2016, the DAC agreed to consider future reforms to the ODA system so that it remains relevant and credible.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

The noble Lords, Lord Collins and Lord Anderson, and the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, raised issues about consultation. I can assure them that the Government will certainly consult with key civil society organisations as we develop our plans for reform. We will be interested to hear what changes our NGO partners believe would be beneficial in delivering the SDGs.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, referred to how money is being spent, particularly humanitarian aid to Iraq. On the current provision of aid to Mosul, we are clear that the protection of civilians must remain a top priority. The UK Government continue to be at the forefront of efforts supporting the Government of Iraq and the UN-supported humanitarian response. But as we saw only today, with the tragedy of the mosque being attacked and destroyed by Daesh forces, the challenges remain immense.

On Syria, there were specific questions about how much was raised. Donors exceeded their pledge at the 2016 conference, having allocated \$8 billion. I can share with your Lordships the fact that by February 2017, \$6.2 billion of this had been delivered. The next tracking report is due in July, when we will be able to report on delivery against pledges at the Brussels conference.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, talked about the trade approach with countries that have international obligations linked to Sudan. I assure him that the UK has a strong history of protecting human rights. We will of course encourage all states to uphold international human rights obligations and work with those determined to reform. As the Minister responsible for human rights at the FCO, I certainly look forward to working with him and others on ensuring that the issues which need to be raised can be put on the table. Where we need to have those candid discussions with particular countries that are recipients of aid, yes, we want to help their development but at the same time, we need to ensure that their governance models are reflective of the democracies that they aspire to be. In relation to Sudan I assure the noble Lord and the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, that the UK will continue to be clear on where we have fundamental disagreements. But we believe that maintaining dialogue with Sudan is important, to improve co-operation in areas where we have shared interests and to press our case where we disagree.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, and the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, also raised the question of EPAs. Around 80 countries currently benefit from preferences to the UK market under the EU scheme. Trade preferences boost economic growth and reduce poverty by helping to create jobs and by increasing growth. As we leave the EU, we will establish a UK trade preference scheme to minimise disruption to our trading relationships with developing nations. That includes replicating EU preferential arrangements to ensure continuity in our trade and investment relationships with third countries. Details of the UK's future trade preference policy will be set out in Parliament.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, raised the question of the family planning summit. On safe abortion, I assure the noble Baroness that the US and the UK are

not like-minded. Research shows that restricting access to abortion services does not make abortions less common; it only increases the risk. The UK will continue to show global health leadership by promoting and supporting comprehensive, evidence-based sexual and reproductive health and rights, including through our global family planning summit in July. We will continue to work with all our partners to accelerate progress in this respect.

To protect our people and our country, we will continue to invest in our Armed Forces. My noble friend Lord Howe very eloquently set out the detail about how we will progress. We will invest in the new generation of nuclear-armed submarines. We estimate that the cost equates to just 20p in every £100 of annual government spending over the next 35 years. I thank the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, and other noble Lords for the broad support that we receive for the continued commitment to spending 2% of GDP on defence and 20% of the budget on equipment and research. I assure noble Lords that we will keep our people safe by tackling the threat of terrorism at source. That is why we will continue to play a leading role in international military action to tackle Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

The noble Lord, Lord Touhig, asked about Royal Marine numbers. I assure him that we continue to have the appropriate number of front-line Royal Marines to achieve all tasking, and we will ensure that the Royal Marines are properly trained and equipped to perform the vital task that we ask of them. The noble Lord asked a series of questions, and I am sure my noble friend Lord Howe noted them and will write to him accordingly.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, and my noble friend Lord Sterling asked about the SDSR. The Government conducted a comprehensive strategic defence and security review in 2015. The evolving security situation means that we must constantly review the best way to keep Britain safe. That is why spending is continuously monitored. This approach helps to ensure that the £178 billion of equipment planned will deliver the cutting-edge ships, aircraft and armoured vehicles that our military needs now and in future.

The noble Lord, Lord West, asked a series of questions about defence, including the defence of our waters. Maritime security remains a priority. The Ministry of Defence continues to contribute to Her Majesty's Government's efforts in protecting the UK's territorial waters by providing a multilayered capability to deter incursions into territorial waters.

The noble Lord, Lord Judd, asked about the nuclear deterrent. I believe he endorsed it, but he asked whether it costs too much. The cost of the Trident programme is around 6% of the total defence spend.

The noble Lord, Lord West, raised the issue of the lack of weapons on ships. I assure him that all Royal Navy ships are equipped with weapons appropriate to their operational tasking. As he will know, the Royal Navy continually reviews the capabilities required to deliver that tasking.

Lord West of Spithead: One has operational tasking for something, but we know that what happens is that you end up doing something else, particularly if you

are globally deployed. That was my point about not having that capability. Having been deployed and suddenly being somewhere, I know that if you do not have the weapons, you get sunk and your people get killed. That was the point I was making. It seems to me to be a risk.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Again, the noble Lord speaks from great experience. He might be quoting some sort of history lesson here, but thankfully we leave those for Questions. We have noted his concern, and his experience is vital for the debates and consideration. I am sure my noble friend Lord Howe will reply to him accordingly.

The noble Lord also raised the issue of the national shipbuilding strategy, which will be published in the near future, I understand. He asked a question about manpower for the new "Queen Elizabeth" carrier, as did the noble Lord, Lord Toulhig. That has been allocated, and we believe it is sufficient. The Aircraft Carrier Alliance is in the process of finalising arrangements for the "Queen Elizabeth" carrier to commence sea trials. This is the latest stage of trials and commissioning of the ship, as well as technical preparations. As the noble Lord will know better than most, a series of factors need to be considered, not least the state of tides and weather, which need to be favourable for the ship to actually exit dock.

My noble friend Lord Balfe asked about continued defence co-operation with the EU after we leave. I assure my noble friend that the UK is a global player and that we recognise that we need to remain engaged in the world, including in central European and foreign and security policy arrangements after we leave the EU. Discussions will continue to that effect.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, raised the impact of the fall of sterling on defence spending. The MoD centrally manages the impacts of variations on foreign exchange rates as part of its routine financial management, and arrangements are in place to limit the impact of the current foreign exchange position for several years. As someone who spent many years in the City, I assure him that exchange rate fluctuations cause a few people, not just those in defence, to miss a heartbeat now and again. It is about how you can mitigate that risk.

The noble and gallant Lord, the noble Baroness, Lady Dean, and others also raised the issues of recruitment, retention and training for our brave service men and women. My noble friend referred earlier to the fact that we are modernising our employment offer, introducing a Bill to make it easier for our regulars to work more flexibly. Equally, as the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, said, this is also about the veterans who have already served their country. I am pleased to inform him that proposals are under consideration. As he knows, the MoD plays a key role in co-ordinating support and services for veterans in partnership with other government departments. We believe that the current approach is fit for purpose and delivers effectively and appropriately. However, a new service, the Veterans' Gateway, as the noble Lord, Lord Toulhig, just acknowledged, was formally launched on 20 June. This is a £2 million grant from the Covenant Fund,

which has been made to a consortium of charities, led by the Royal British Legion, to set up the one-stop service to better support the UK's veterans community.

The noble Lord, Lord West, also raised a number of points about the size of the Navy. In the interests of time, again, I am sure my noble friend will write to him.

It seems appropriate that in the last few minutes I come to my own department, foreign affairs. I assure all noble Lords that I look forward to working with noble Lords from across your Lordships' House as we move forward on this important agenda. The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, raised the issue of the US state visit, which was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. As my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary stated yesterday, an invitation has been extended to President Trump and has been accepted. There are no changes to the visit, but it was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech as the dates have not yet been fixed.

The noble Lords, Lord Collins and Lord Sharkey, raised important issues about Cyprus. The UK continues to encourage all sides to engage in positive and flexible discussions on all the issues relating to the settlement, urging focus on practical solutions that protect the rights and security of both communities in a future unified Cyprus. We welcome the decision of the parties to reconvene the conference on Cyprus on 28 June, and I confirm to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, that we stand ready to participate in the conference at an appropriate level.

Key aspects of the work of the Foreign Office relate to promoting peace, security and stability. Various questions were raised about the Gulf Cooperation Council and the situation with Qatar. I assure all noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Collins and Lord Hannay, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has spoken to the leaders in the Gulf to urge unity and de-escalation. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has also reiterated this key message to his counterparts in the region.

We encourage Qatar to engage seriously with the substance of their neighbours' concerns, and we encourage its neighbours to relax the restrictions imposed on it. I assure noble Lords that the UK and the US remain in close contact as we work together with international partners, including key European partners such as the French, to calm further tensions in the region.

On the point that was raised by my noble friend Lord Suri and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, about sanctions and future regimes, we will introduce a sanctions Bill to provide a legislative framework for the UK to continue to meet its international obligations and use sanctions after the UK's departure from the EU. We will also support the reform of international systems, including the UN.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, and the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, talked of Syria and the Assad regime. It remains the Government's consistent view that it is the Assad regime's military campaign that has driven the conflict and, as far as we are concerned, there can be only a transition away from the Assad regime to a new

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

and more inclusive Government who can unite all sides and bring peace to Syria. That remains the UK Government's objective.

The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, asked specific questions about Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Again, in the interests of time, I will write to her and share with noble Lords the detail on that. Likewise, the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, asked specific questions about Sudan, as did the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, and I will write to them as well.

I have two or three final points, if I may seek noble Lords' indulgence. First, on the important issue of security and combating terrorism, extremism is a global scourge and requires an international response. I assure noble Lords that we continue to work with partners to eradicate it and, yes, we will look at how we can further work with our European partners as we leave the EU. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, raised this issue, among others, and my noble friend Lord Suri raised the issue of cybersecurity. Quite appropriately, the noble Lord, Lord Judd, talked about how hearts and minds must be won in this respect. As this is a portfolio that I shall be looking after at the Foreign Office, I will certainly be looking to noble Lords across the House on how we can work this important agenda because it needs a consistent, consolidated and collaborative effort across the board.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, as always, spoke passionately about freedom of religion around the world. Again, I am honoured to be given that portfolio as part of the FCO team. Freedom of religion is a universal human right, and we will work in collaboration with DfID to ensure that we can promote and protect the right to freedom of religion and belief internationally. DfID works closely with the FCO to raise concerns about freedom of religion. I assure the noble Lord that we are safeguarding and consistently raise the important issue of the persecution in certain parts of the world of Christian minorities, Yazidis and other minorities. He mentioned the Ahmadiyya community, which of course is close to my heart. We need to ensure that the British Government stand up for the rights of all minorities, no matter where they are in the world. In the discussions that we have around the world, that means having those sometimes candid discussions to ensure that those protections can be afforded. I look forward to working with the noble Lord and others on that important area.

Today has been a rare day when we saw agreement between my noble friend Lord Polak and the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge. It is one of those important days of collaboration, and long may that last. He rightly raised concerns around Hezbollah and other groups whose political and military wings are not limited in what they do. I am sure he will appreciate that the Government consistently review the situation with all such groups. If there are concerns that need to be raised directly with me, I am of course available. I welcome the contribution that my noble friend made, as did other noble Lords, about the important and continuing role of DfID.

The noble Lords, Lord Alton and Lord Hylton, talked about refugees and continuing aid. As the House will know, the Government remain committed to

supporting the countries that border Syria. In particular, we have committed £423 million bilaterally to Jordan, for example, to support humanitarian aid and also, importantly, we invest in education and job opportunities for Syrian refugees. Again, I assure the noble Lord that we will be reaching out to vulnerable people across the country, particularly Christian minorities, who have suffered and are suffering persecution. UK funding is distributed on the basis of need to ensure that civilians are not discriminated against.

The issue of modern slavery was raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Young, and I welcome her contribution. As she noted, this, too, was mentioned in the gracious Speech. The Prime Minister has made modern slavery a top foreign policy priority. It is another portfolio responsibility that I carry and I look forward to hearing from her on the specific issue of supply chains that she raised. I would welcome working collaboratively with her on the important modern slavery agenda.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, raised the issue of climate change. I assure him and others that the Government continue to believe that the Paris agreement is the basis for a global framework to progress forward. Of course we regret the position of the United States on this.

I assure the noble Lord, Lord Shutt, that I have not forgotten him. Certain things carry forward from one portfolio to the next. As I am a former Aviation Minister, it is appropriate that an aviation issue carries forward. The Ascension Island Government have been working with employing organisations on the island and we have also discussed options for interim air services to Ascension. I assure the noble Lord that the runway is not closed; part of it remains open to small aircraft, as he mentioned in his contribution. We of course understand the frustration caused by the suspension of regular flights, but I assure him that we are working to find alternative access arrangements.

I am very conscious of time, and I see that my noble friend Lady Goldie is scribbling a note. However, I cannot conclude my remarks without mentioning the Commonwealth—even after I said that my voice might pack up. I have left this important issue until the end, and it really is the last issue. I pay tribute to all noble Lords who raised this important issue, including my noble friend Lord Polak and the noble Lord, Lord Luce. Of course I pay particular tribute to my noble friend Lord Howell. I will be working very closely with him. He has wide experience in this field and does not yet know that we have a meeting with him and the Royal Commonwealth Society in early July. I look forward to that. We are hosting an important summit next year and I look forward to working with all noble Lords across the piece to ensure that we put this on the agenda.

Finally, on the Commonwealth agenda, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Alli, that it is a great responsibility, and LGBT rights are an important item on the agenda. Just today I signed off on a particular issue on the Human Rights Council where we ensured that the UK insisted on calling a vote on a resolution on the protection of the family because we believed that, as it stood, it did not recognise that there are many diverse forms of family. I look forward to working with the noble Lord and others on this important agenda.

I thank noble Lords for their indulgence during my closing remarks. I have never usurped so much time, but there was a wide range of issues to cover on a global stage, involving a variety of important departments. I say earnestly and most sincerely that I thank all noble Lords who have taken part in this important debate. I thank in particular the Front Benches and of course my noble friend Lord Howe. He is a constant source of support and mentoring for many of us who have joined the Front Bench. He is very distinguished

in his contributions and I assure noble Lords that his wise counsel will be something that I will rely on. Of course, I will be assisted in this important brief by my noble friend Lady Goldie. As we have seen, she does her job very efficiently and effectively—and long may that continue.

Debate adjourned until Monday 26 June.

House adjourned at 6.48 pm.

