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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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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 |

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House of Lords

Thursday 19 April 2018

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Coventry.

Police: Independent Inquiries Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what criteria must be satisfied for them to establish an independent inquiry into a police investigation.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, it is not possible to identify a definitive set of criteria to determine when the Government should establish an inquiry. Inquiries result from a huge variety of events, and each decision has to be taken on its merits.

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Con): Is my noble friend aware that the demand for an independent inquiry into the police investigation into Sir Edward Heath is not going to go away? Does she agree that the best thing would of course be for the Wiltshire police and crime commissioner to set up his own independent inquiry? This Tuesday, yet again, he refused point blank to do so. Is not the only option now for the Home Office to set up such an inquiry?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: As I said the other day, an inquiry of any form should be considered only where other available investigatory mechanisms would not be sufficient. I absolutely concur with this demand, which is repeatedly made from your Lordships' House. My noble friend is correct that the Wiltshire PCC has it in his power to initiate such an inquiry.

Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate (Non-Affl): My Lords, does the new independent office of police misconduct have a role in this type of inquiry? It can of course initiate its own inquiries.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I should clarify that it is the Independent Office for Police Conduct rather than misconduct, as the noble Lord knows. The IOPC can investigate a matter referred to it, but it also has call-in powers to require referral. In terms of investigating a police force, the IOPC is independent of government and the Home Secretary does not have the power to direct it to investigate a force or any of its officers. The key functions of the IOPC include providing independent oversight of the police complaints and discipline system, considering appeals when people believe that a police investigation into a complaint has got it wrong, and carrying out its own investigations into the most serious and sensitive matters relating to police conduct.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, I understand the concern of noble Lords about the reputation of the right honourable Sir Edward Heath, but what about Bishop Bell, Lord Brittan or Sir Cliff Richard? It pains

me to say this, but the police and the media cannot be trusted to comply with their own regulations on this issue. Will the Minister meet me to explore how my upcoming Private Member's Bill to legally preserve anonymity before charge might be supported by the Government?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I am always happy to meet the noble Lord; we meet regularly. I understand all the cases that he talks about, which have gone through various mechanisms of investigation, and am happy to meet him to talk about his Private Member's Bill.

Lord Butler of Brockwell (CB): My Lords, is it not the case that the examples which the noble Lord has just made strengthen the case for an inquiry by the Government? Can the Minister tell us whether the Government are legally debarred from setting up such an investigation, or whether they have such powers but have so far chosen not to use them in this case?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The Government are not debarred from setting up an inquiry, and there are mechanisms to do so under the Inquiries Act. But as I said to my noble friend, an inquiry of any form should be considered only when other available investigatory mechanisms would not be sufficient. As I explained to him, there are other available mechanisms.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, as my noble friend has just admitted, there is nothing to prevent the Government acting. As the Home Office could do with some good publicity at the moment, could we not have a High Court judge or retired judge appointed to look into the implications of the Edward Heath case, the Brittan case and the Bishop Bell case, because there is profound public unease about all these things?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: As I stated, the PCC is completely within his powers to initiate such an inquiry.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, further to the correspondence that I drew to the Minister's attention the other day, we now have access to 10 FoI responses by Macpherson to people in the Wiltshire area. Perhaps I may read one of them:

"Should the Inquiry prove unable or unwilling to take this task on"—

and it has said that it is not willing to take it on—

"I will reiterate my earlier call for the government to establish a judge-led review of the evidence".

He makes it quite clear there what his position is. That was on 10 October last year, only five days after the publication of the Conifer report. Why do Ministers not bring this man into the department, have a word with him and tell him to get on with the job he was given when he was appointed as the police commissioner for Wiltshire?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I shall certainly take that suggestion forward, to stop myself getting beaten over the head every day over this matter. But more seriously, the noble Lord has very kindly brought to my attention the correspondence received and I have

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]
written to the PCC. I have also written to noble Lords, as I said the other day, to make the position quite clear: that he can initiate such an inquiry.

Lord Dobbs (Con): My Lords, I am a Salisbury boy and proud to be the descendant of four generations of policemen. May I let my noble friend into a little secret? I did not have much time for Ted, either personally or politically, but this is not natural justice. Will she not accept that, if we cannot get to grips with these serial cases of misrepresentation and allegations, it will serve only to undermine genuine attempts to deal with the really serious cases that must be dealt with?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I totally appreciate my noble friend's point, but when he talks about this not being natural justice, Ted Heath has not been convicted of anything. Of course he has not; he is deceased. But there is a mechanism to go forward, if an inquiry wishes to take this forward, through the PCC and he is within his powers to do so.

Lord Armstrong of Ilminster (CB): My Lords, the Minister said that the Government will not mount an inquiry while there were other ways of doing so. The police and crime commissioner has, regrettably, refused to do so. What other ways are available at present?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: There is the mechanism that the PCC is elected, and the people will take a view on how he performs his role when it comes to his future election.

Legal Aid Question

11.15 am

Asked by **Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure sufficient availability of legal aid.

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Keen of Elie) (Con): My Lords, we recognise that the availability of legal aid is an important part of maintaining access to justice. The Government remain committed to targeting legal aid to those who need it, while balancing that with the cost to the taxpayer. As the Lord Chancellor has confirmed, we will conduct an evidence-based review of LASPO and will publish our findings later this year.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): I thank the Minister for his reply, and I am conscious that this is not the first time this Question has been asked, but it is generally acknowledged, in particular by legally trained Chancellors, that the quality of advocacy provided by properly trained barristers is of a significantly higher quality than that which is provided by others in court. Does the Minister agree that not only is the criminal Bar an essential part of the criminal justice system but it also requires adequate fees to function properly?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, we agree that the criminal Bar is one of the vital pillars underpinning the rule of law and that its contribution should be fairly rewarded.

Lord Beecham (Lab): My Lords, there are two forms of advice desert in relation to the current legal aid system. One is geographic, where legal advice is simply unavailable because there are no longer legal aid practitioners to provide it, and the other is in relation to particularly sensitive and important areas, such as housing or family law, where the number of cases receiving legal help since LASPO has dropped from 200,000 to 40,000 in the last financial year. Will the long-awaited LASPO review address these problems? Do the Government have an open mind in relation to the possible restoration of legal aid and advice currently denied to people of limited means, with the added benefit of reducing the pressure on the courts system from the growing number of unrepresented parties to proceedings?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, with particular reference to housing, at present 133 of the 134 housing and debt procurement areas for legal aid have provision, and in addition there is provision for telephone advice in the context of housing issues that are covered by LASPO. Our review will embrace all the issues that are being raised by interested groups and will take account of the observations made by the noble Lord, Lord Low, and the noble Lord, Lord Bach, in their respective reports.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB): My Lords, when the Government inquiry takes place, will it please look at the situation of the criminal Bar, which is currently in very real trouble? The noble Baroness made an important point about the very good advocacy of the criminal Bar. It is under real threat and is an issue which the Government have to look at.

Lord Keen of Elie: We are conscious of the contribution that the criminal Bar makes. The noble and learned Baroness is alluding to developments with regard to recent changes to the advocates' graduated fee scheme. That scheme was developed in conjunction with the profession, in particular the Bar Council. The changes are intended to create a simpler and more modern pay system which better reflects the reality of the work being done. As regards the question of an inquiry, a review by the Lord Chancellor is ongoing and we intend to report on it in the course of this year.

Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames (LD): My Lords, the impact assessment for LASPO anticipated annual savings of £450 million. In fact, annual savings have been running at about £950 million. Last month's terms of reference for the LASPO review commit the Government to ensuring that legal aid is, "available to those who need it".

Given that this aim is clearly not currently being achieved, will the Government make these extra savings of £500 million available to fund any proposals made on the review for extra legal aid spending? Has that been made clear to officials conducting the review within the department?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, the coalition Government introduced LAPSO in order to ensure that legal aid was directed at those who most require it. The figure of £950 million arises only in the context of a comparison between 2010 and 2016. In that period, legal aid expenditure fell by about £950 million, or 38% in real terms.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (Con): My Lords, is it intended that the review will cover third-party litigation funding? Third-party litigation funding is a useful access to justice, but too often the division of any awards of damages between those who provide the funding and those in whose name the cases are being brought are obscure. Would it not be a good idea if the courts had the power to require the disclosure of such terms to ensure fairness between all the parties?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, the matter of third-party litigation funding is of course a matter of contract between two parties, and the Government would be slow to interfere in that contractual process.

Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab): My Lords, further to the excellent question from my noble friend Lord Beecham, will the Government now at last admit that they have denied access to justice to hundreds of thousands of people, with cuts to legal aid taking people with social security, homelessness, mental health and other extremely important issues out of scope; widespread confusion as to who remains eligible; difficulty in proving financial eligibility; and a very damaging fall in the number of legal aid providers? How does the Minister explain the collapse in the number of private practice and not-for-profit organisations undertaking legal aid work? Will the Government now act to restore access to justice as a basic right of citizenship?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, we recognise the need for access to justice; it is a fundamental common-law right. We seek to ensure that there is a legal aid scheme that is affordable but allows for access to justice. That scheme is currently the subject of review by the Ministry of Justice.

Lord Watts (Lab): My Lords, does the Minister agree with that famous saying, “British justice is the best in the world if you can afford it”? Do we not need a different legal system that makes it possible for ordinary people to pursue cases in the courts?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, I am not familiar with that particular comment.

Children: Obesity *Question*

11.21 am

Asked by Baroness Jenkin of Kennington

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what action they are planning to reduce childhood obesity.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord O’Shaughnessy) (Con): My Lords, the Government’s childhood obesity plan, launched in August 2016, focuses on the areas that are

likely to have the biggest impact on preventing childhood obesity. All reports and data on progress in delivering our plan will be published and open to scrutiny. We will use this to determine whether sufficient progress has been made and whether alternative levers need to be considered.

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, I am well aware that we had a pretty comprehensive trot around the issue earlier this week but I did not have the opportunity to raise with the Minister the issue of the Daily Mile, an initiative started some six years ago in a small Scottish primary school where children were encouraged to run for 15 minutes a day, which turns out to be a mile. Since then the initiative has proliferated and now over 3,300 schools are participating. It has been independently evaluated and proven to show a massive improvement in health, well-being and academic attainment. The Scottish and Welsh Governments have written to every single primary school encouraging them to participate. Would the Minister please consider doing the same here?

Lord O’Shaughnessy: Following the debate that we had the other day, I looked up the Daily Mile online. It is now in 2,000 schools across the UK. My right honourable friend the Secretary of State has described it as an excellent initiative, which indeed it looks like. It certainly seems to develop good habits of physical and mental health. Writing to schools is of course a matter for the Department for Education, but I will certainly speak to my colleagues in that department to encourage schools to take this up. In the spirit of the debate of the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, I think it would be better to end with a quote from William at Woodfield Primary School in Wigan, who said that the Daily Mile,

“helps you with your maths, English, and you get faster each time, which makes you healthier”.

What more could you want?

Lord Blunkett (Lab): My Lords, I cannot match the alliteration of the Minister but I ask him if he and his colleagues in other departments would consider an addition to the sport, to the dietary and to the drive against sugar, given the evidence of the recent review that the Government undertook into full-time social youth action in which organisations such as Volunteering Matters and City Year UK demonstrate that work by young people for young people against bullying, emotional trauma and mental health problems can have a real effect.

Lord O’Shaughnessy: I completely agree with the noble Lord. I believe that he chairs the National Citizen Service, which has been a massive initiative to encourage such habits in teenagers. I completely concur with him: the Government take a number of approaches to encourage youth social action, and that is something that we will continue to support.

Baroness Redfern (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend agree that families need to be presented with clear information about the food they buy and how important clear labelling is? Does he agree that when the UK leaves the EU, that will give us a greater

[BARONESS REDFERN]

flexibility to determine what information should be presented on packaged food and how it should be displayed?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: My noble friend is absolutely right: this is one of the many opportunities which this country will enjoy after we have left the European Union. We will have the flexibility to vary food labelling to ensure that we can use the very best, and latest techniques to encourage people to eat more healthily.

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, there are two components to keeping fit and losing weight. One is exercise—the example we have had is excellent—and the other, of course, is food. There are three partnerships in that: there is the department of health and the Department for Education, but parents are critical. What work has been done to involve parents in this whole issue? It is really serious, because obese children will probably be obese adults, and we know where that goes.

Lord O'Shaughnessy: The noble Baroness is absolutely right: parents are of course the first educators of their children and it is about them being able to set an example. I would focus on a couple of things: first, the national curriculum in schools, which is encouraging parents to get involved in understanding what good nutrition is, how to cook well and so on. The second is Public Health England's new One You campaign, posters of which are up now, which talks about the 400, 600, 600 of calories per meal per day to encourage parents to get into good habits, because of course, if they have good habits and are well informed, their children will too.

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab): My Lords, does the Minister believe that within the plan there may be a greater role for the major broadcasters in this country to give a stronger lead against these problems? The BBC, in particular, has major flagship programmes which are primarily about eating, putting on weight and calories, but the same applies to the other channels. Will he join me in a conversation with the BBC to try to persuade them to produce a major flagship programme that addresses the issue, particularly with regard to children?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: That is rather an interesting idea and suggestion from the noble Lord. We would need to speak to colleagues in the DCMS—which I would be delighted to do. I think that broadcasters such as the BBC have traditionally played a very important and positive role in public health issues and continue to do so, and I am happy to encourage them to do so in this area, too.

Lord Elton (Con): My Lords, while recognising the essential nature of sufficient exercise at all ages, in the absence of my noble friend Lord McColl of Dulwich, I again remind the House that the more you exercise, the more you eat.

Noble Lords: He is here.

Lord Elton: I understood that he was in China; I do not understand his silence.

Lord O'Shaughnessy: All I can say is that both my noble friends are excellent examples of slim and fit young men.

Lord Turnberg (Lab): I am sure that the Minister is aware that while exercise is very good for children and adults—it improves mental and physical health—it does not do much for obesity. It is food that does the worst. It is not just sugar, it is fat, and ice cream, crisps and chocolates are so appealing to children. Ice cream has twice the calories of sugar. Will he consider how to get that message across?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: One thing I noticed at Easter was that Easter eggs seem to have got bigger. I was counting the calories on the Easter egg that my children had. There is a serious point there. It is about reformulation, it is not just about reduced sugar, salt and so on; it is also about smaller portion sizes, and that is a measure that we are tracking as well.

Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con): My Lords, it is really me. Is the Minister aware that a recent report from Canada showed that children who were fed on whole milk for the first eight years of their life were much healthier than those not, and they were not obese? Why on earth did we ever start skimming milk when human breast milk has the same amount of fat as cows' milk? As far as I know, we have not started skimming human breast milk yet.

Lord O'Shaughnessy: I am trying to imagine how that might work. The noble Lord makes an important point which he also made in a debate the other day, that our understanding of dietary needs is changing. In some ways, we are rediscovering old truths about the importance of fat and reduction of sugar. That is part of the approach that Public Health England is promoting.

Non-Olympic Sports *Question*

11.30 am

Asked by Lord Addington

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to provide resources and support structures for non-Olympic sports following the success of the home nations at the Commonwealth Games.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): My Lords, the home nations have indeed had a successful Commonwealth Games, collectively amassing 228 medals. Home nations sports councils support talent pathways, which lead into this Commonwealth success. Over the period 2017-21, Sport England is investing nearly £50 million of core funding to support sports that do not feature in Olympic and Paralympic programmes. This will help national governing bodies to deliver talent pathways, projects to tackle inactivity and increasing participation in sports.

Lord Addington (LD): I thank the Minister for that Answer. Would he not accept that certain sports, and netball is the obvious example, are very unlikely to get

into the Olympics any time soon, but have a tremendous capacity for improving not only elite-level sport but mass participation? Under those circumstances, why are they dependent for support on something that is designed for grass-roots activity as its primary concern? Should there not be some way to support these sports that do not yet have the Olympic symbol and also those that are missing in the medal total?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: My Lords, it is crucial that funding is invested strategically in the right sports, the right athletes and the right support programmes. The noble Lord is right that England Netball is having great success at the national level, winning the gold medal, in its strengthened domestic superleague and in increasing participation at grass-roots level. Not only does it benefit from Sport England support but we will be welcoming to Liverpool the 2019 World Cup, where I wish it every success. This is a work in progress. Netball's focus needs to be on looking ahead much further than just two or three years.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, following on from my noble friend's Question, one problem that netball, squash and bowls face, because they are not Olympic sports, is that their performers are not eligible for athlete performance awards, which is a different issue to talent pathways. The APAs for swimming are £3.6 million, for hockey £4.4 million and for modern pentathlon over £600,000. All those sports were also played at the Commonwealth Games. Are we not setting back the three sports that are not played at Olympic level by not allowing them to be eligible for APAs?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: We will certainly be looking at that, but UK Sport has a clear remit, agreed with government, to maximise medal performance at Olympic and Paralympic Games, which covers many of the things that the noble Baroness has mentioned. This allowed it to achieve unprecedented medal success at Rio, but I will take her point back.

National Security Situation

Motion to Take Note

11.33 am

Moved by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

That this House takes note of the national security situation.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, I begin, if I may, on a slightly lighter note, given our serious subject. I could not but smile when I heard the great debate among your Lordships about jogging and taking up fitness. I am delighted to say that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting has started very successfully at Buckingham Palace. However, seeing the gridlock that awaited me, I, along with the shadow Foreign Secretary, took to a sedate walk, but I then took to jogging to ensure that I reached your Lordships' House on time. I think I should now subscribe to your Lordships' jogging team—it would certainly do my waistline a great deal of benefit.

I am pleased to be opening this debate. I do so at a time when we are perhaps facing a greater range of challenges to our national security than we have seen

in a generation. The picture is much more complex and in many ways arguably much less predictable than at any time since the Second World War. In particular, there are growing and diverse threats to the rules-based international order on which we have depended for our security, stability and prosperity for over 70 years. For decades, internationally agreed treaties, regimes and norms have helped to safeguard us against the worst excesses of human behaviour. Today they are being undermined and the safeguards flouted, not just by non-state actors but by states, with a flagrant disregard for their people and their international obligations. I assure noble Lords that the United Kingdom is standing firm in the face of these threats, and we will continue to do so. I will set out how we are doing that, and I will also update your Lordships' House on our responses to the horrific chemical weapons attack in Syria—part of a continuing pattern of such attacks—and the reckless use of a nerve agent in Salisbury.

I am also pleased and delighted that I am joined by my noble friend Lord Howe, who brings great expertise and insight from his experience. I am delighted that he will close the debate, demonstrating again the seriousness with which the national security issue is taken across government.

Our 2015 strategic defence and security review foresaw this uncertain world and its emerging threats, but the trends it identified have come to pass even faster than anyone could have expected. The *National Security Capability Review* that the Government published last month identified a number of key changes. The first was a rise in state threats and state competition, in particular from Russia, which has expanded the range of its meddling beyond Ukraine to the western Balkans, Syria, and even to the outrageous attack on the streets of Salisbury. Russia has a long history of such behaviour, but it is now prepared to take greater risks. It more frequently uses disinformation and cyberattacks to meddle in other states' affairs. In addition, Russia also continues to strengthen its military capabilities, including its nuclear and missile forces, while undermining the treaties and norms of global arms control, disarmament and counterproliferation.

The second key change is in the threat from terrorism and instability. With our international coalition partners we have made progress against the core of Daesh in Syria and Iraq. I had the opportunity to visit Iraq last month. I travelled to Mosul and I saw first-hand the importance of bringing Daesh to justice as well as how incredibly important it is that women and girls must play a central and pivotal role in stabilising the country—a belief I know we collectively share. I was delighted to launch the UK's national action plan on women, peace and security while I was in Iraq. However, despite our success against the core of Daesh, we all recognise and know that the threat from extremist terrorism remains. Today, the threat has become more dispersed. This means that while Europe continues to face a threat from organised groups, there has also been a rise in less sophisticated attacks such as the ones that took place on the streets of London last year, in which the principal weapons were not bombs but vehicles and knives.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

Another change identified by the review is the increasing threat to the rules-based international order that I mentioned earlier. This vital foundation for our peace and security is being intentionally degraded. I am the Minister for the United Nations, and when you look at that international body, you will see that Russia has used its veto 12 times to stall the work of the UN Security Council on Syria, using fundamentally flawed and wilfully misleading pretexts to prevent the action the international community needs to take. Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons and North Korea's multiple nuclear explosive and ballistic missile tests have flouted international legal obligations.

At the same time, Russia's new missile programmes raise serious questions about whether it is still complying with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, one of the cornerstones of US-Russia strategic stability. Of course, we should not and do not consider these threats in isolation since each can impact on the other. For example, the risk of non-state actors getting hold of biological, chemical or nuclear material increases when states wilfully erode the treaties, conventions and indeed the norms that are designed to prevent the proliferation of such material.

Thus far I have painted what perhaps some would say is a very gloomy picture, but it is important to recognise that this is only one side of the story. The UK enjoys a range of world-leading capabilities in defence, diplomacy, intelligence and cybersecurity. Let me say how pleased I was, in this Commonwealth summit week, to see that yesterday the Prime Minister was able to announce a £15 million package of support for Commonwealth countries to strengthen their cybersecurity capabilities. In addition to these significant assets, the UK also projects formidable influence thanks to sharing our experience of democracy, on how to build, sustain and strengthen democracies, as well as in its support for the media and cultural organisations. I refer also to the incredible work undertaken across the world by our NGOs and other civil society groups.

We are not facing these threats alone. Our international partnerships are robust and our global influence is significant, as we have seen in the wake of the recent events in Syria and Salisbury. Let me turn now to the specific threats to our national security.

In Syria, the ongoing conflict continues not only to cause untold pain for the Syrian people—women, children and men—but also to threaten the stability of neighbouring countries and wider international security. The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime causes extreme human suffering in Syria and is a clear challenge to the international rules that keep us all safe. Before it was blocked by a series of Russian vetoes in New York, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism found that the regime had used chemical weapons not once, not twice, but in four separate incidents between 2014 and 2017.

In Douma, on 7 April, there was yet another chemical weapons attack which killed up to 75 people, including many women and children. Let me assure noble Lords that we have worked with our allies to establish

what happened. Russia's grotesque accusation that the attack was somehow staged by the United Kingdom does not deserve to be dignified by any further response. A significant amount of information, including intelligence, indicates that this was a chemical weapons attack and that the Syrian regime was responsible. It is the latest horrifying example of the lengths it is prepared to go to and the human suffering it is prepared to inflict.

The Syrian regime's persistent pattern of behaviour had to be stopped. We sought diplomatic channels to achieve this. Let me answer a question that has been raised and assure noble Lords that we will continue to do so, but our efforts have been repeatedly thwarted. There was no practicable alternative to the use of force to alleviate humanitarian suffering. The military action we took, closely co-ordinated with our allies, the United States and France, was proportionate and took every step to avoid civilian casualties. Our strikes were carefully targeted to alleviate humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deterring its future use. The strikes sent a clear message to Bashar al-Assad and others who might be bent on undermining the international rules-based order: we were prepared to take action to defend that order. As the Prime Minister has said, the strikes were legally and morally right. The way we protect our national interest is by standing up for the global rules and standards that keep us all safe.

I turn now to the events in Salisbury. The attempted assassination of Sergei and Yulia Skripal was another example of blatant disdain for the established framework of international rules. However, I am sure I speak for all in your Lordships' House when I say it was good to hear that, despite the poor early prognosis, Yulia Skripal was well enough to be discharged from hospital last week. That is testimony to the quick and professional response of the emergency services and the incredible NHS staff, and I hope—I am sure I speak for all Members of your Lordships' House—that Sergei Skripal's condition also continues to improve.

On 12 April, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons explicitly confirmed the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical used in Salisbury. This supports our finding that it was a military-grade nerve agent known as Novichok. The OPCW report also noted that it had high levels of purity. This is indicative of expert production in the kind of controlled scientific environment more likely to be found in a state than in, say, a criminal or terrorist network. Of course, although the identification of the nerve agent is an essential piece of technical evidence in our investigation, neither Porton Down's analysis nor the OPCW's report identifies the country or place of origin of the agent used in this attack. We continue to assess that there is no plausible alternative explanation for what happened in Salisbury to Russian state responsibility.

In his letter to the NATO Secretary-General, our National Security Adviser, Sir Mark Sedwill, published details of Russia's programme of testing means of delivering nerve agents, including their application to door handles, where the highest concentration of the nerve agent, Novichok, was found in Salisbury. He also

detailed the Russian intelligence services' interest in the Skripals, going back at least as far as 2013. He concluded:

“Only Russia has the technical means, operational experience and the motive”.

That view is shared by our allies, who showed their support with the unprecedented expulsion of 153 Russian diplomats from 28 countries and NATO. This unified international response was vital in signalling a collective condemnation of Russia's actions, and we welcome the latest strong statement of support from the G7 earlier this week.

For its part, Russia has provided no explanation for the existence of undeclared chemical weapons or of how this substance came to be released on British soil. Instead, it has responded to legitimate questioning with a barrage of denials and disinformation, pointing the finger of blame at other countries, including the United Kingdom. To date, through Russian state media and official sources, more than two dozen contradictory and changing fantasies have been proposed to explain who carried out the Salisbury attack—from the Americans, to destabilise the world, to Ukraine, to frame Russia. This disinformation campaign has not worked, as the world's eyes are now open to Russia's attempts at malign influence.

The attack in Salisbury is part of a pattern of Russian aggression over the past decade, from the murder of Alexander Litvinenko to its actions in Crimea and Ukraine. In all cases, the UK has been at the forefront of a strong and determined international response. Sanctions form a key part of that response. EU sanctions have been in place since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, sending a clear message to the Kremlin that the West will not tolerate its flagrant violation of international law. These sanctions are beginning to bite. The Government are committed to imposing further sanctions if necessary to counter Russia's malign actions here in the UK, including criminality, corruption and illicit finance.

We are also prepared to call out activity that breaches norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. In conjunction with international partners, we attributed NotPetya to the Russian military. The joint UK/US advice to industry earlier this week marks an important step in our fight-back against state-sponsored aggression in cyberspace. We will continue to take the necessary actions to counter Russian aggression, but I make it absolutely clear that our quarrel is not with the Russian people and this is not where we want our relationship to be. We held out the hand of engagement but have been given every signal to beware. Instead of this atmosphere of mutual suspicion and the imposition of sanctions, we would prefer to nurture the flourishing cultural links between our countries and maintain, sustain and grow trade. We hope that the Kremlin will take a different path.

In the meantime, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, we must, where possible, along with two other permanent members, maintain a dialogue. Russia and the UK are members of the Security Council and I know that this question has been raised by various noble Lords; indeed, the noble Lord, Lord Collins, raised the specific issue of continuing dialogue

internationally. I assure noble Lords that, as members of the Security Council, this dialogue continues. We do so because we face common challenging issues which impact international security, such as those around North Korea and Iran. We will also continue to encourage Russia to engage constructively on military issues of concern through the NATO-Russia dialogue.

In conclusion, the threats we face are significant and varied. As most of us accept, they threaten not just the UK's national security but that of our allies and the whole international system on which our collective security depends. In the face of these threats, the United Kingdom stands firm and resolute: in the United Nations Security Council, where we continue to push for peace in Syria and the removal of nuclear weapons from North Korea; in defending our data, our systems and our citizens from cyberattack and hostile state activity; in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, where we will continue to work to restore and sustain the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention; and in our determination to end the use of chemical weapons once and for all, wherever it may occur, and to seek justice for the victims of these heinous crimes. We remain absolutely committed to defending our freedom, democracy and rule of law, and to upholding the international rules-based system on which our security and prosperity depend. I beg to move.

11.51 am

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the fact that the Government have brought forward this debate, given both the importance of recent events and the seriousness of the issues that have been raised. I thank the Minister for his introduction to the debate, which, given its nature, was hugely wide ranging. I thank him also for his excellent work at CHOGM. We welcome the fact that he leads for the Government on human rights issues, and nobody in this House would doubt his personal commitment to the issues for which he has ministerial responsibility.

Today's debate provides an opportunity for us to discuss recent issues but also to look at the wider context. In considering our response to recent events, we have to examine our national security and our international role in the long-term strategy for peace and stability in regions of conflict.

There can never be any justification for using chemical weapons. Both the Geneva protocol and, more recently, the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1992 make clear that their use is illegal under international law. Yet the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against civilians is well documented, in a conflict that is estimated to have left around half a million people dead and many thousands more injured, maimed and displaced. The appalling attack on Douma was the latest and the most serious in Syria, with hundreds of people affected and around 70 dead.

However, as we have found, this is not just something that happens hundreds of miles away. As the Minister referred to, we have been shocked by the deliberate and calculated use of a nerve agent here on UK soil in the attempted murder of two individuals without any concern for others who may have been affected. We concur with the Minister's good wishes to all those

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

who have been affected and wish them a full recovery. It is clear that the use of chemical weapons is a serious global issue and we should condemn their use totally and unreservedly. We should also work internationally through the UN and our European allies in full support of the OPCW to ensure that such weapons cannot be manufactured or used in conflict.

Following the multilateral attack on Syrian chemical installations last week, the Prime Minister was clear that she considered that the Government fully complied with international law and that there was no need for Parliament to be consulted. We fully accept that it is not always possible or appropriate for Parliament to be consulted prior to military action. Sometimes, it will be because emergency action is required. There may also be times when operational reasons dictate that it is not possible to provide for such a debate. However, other Prime Ministers have considered it appropriate to consult Parliament, so it would be helpful if the Government today were able to provide the reasons why they believe that prior parliamentary engagement was not appropriate in this case. I am not challenging the Government's judgment but seeking clarity on the principles of consulting, debating and voting in Parliament in advance of military action. I asked this of the Leader of the House on Monday, but she was unable to provide an answer, so if the Minister is able to do so today, I would be grateful.

It is imperative that we ensure that we act at all times within international law and conventions. It is what we ask of others and the standard that we set for ourselves. On Monday, I asked what discussions the Government had had with the UN about the principle of humanitarian intervention and whether any such discussions were ongoing. The noble Baroness the Leader of the House was unable to answer, but it would be helpful to know whether discussions are taking place on such an important issue.

In Syria, as in any area of conflict, there is an urgent need to provide humanitarian relief and medical care, both to refugees forced from their homes and to those who have remained. This country has a proud history of supporting those fleeing violence and having to flee their home country. The Minister will know the strong support that this House gave to the amendment of my noble friend Lord Dubs to what became the Immigration Act 2016. Across Europe, unaccompanied children in camps in Greece, Italy and elsewhere are feeling exactly the anguish and the danger that we have seen in Syria. We had hoped that under the Dubs amendment we would have been able to settle 3,000 children in the UK, and yet, even against the Government's promise of fewer than 500, by the end of last year there were still more than 200 places available under the scheme. Given the desperate plight of these children, can the Minister provide an update on how both the spirit and the letter of the Dubs amendment to protect children, as unaccompanied minors in danger, will be implemented? As the Minister knows, my noble friend Lord Dubs has tabled an amendment to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to ensure that we maintain at least this commitment.

Military action should only ever be one thread of a strategy. Without diplomatic and political efforts, and without humanitarian support, no conflict will ever be

resolved in a way that has long-term sustainability. The OPCW must be allowed to continue its work in Syria unhindered. To date, its inspectors have still not gained access to the site. Does the Minister have an update on this and what action our Government are able to take to help secure that access? We know that the conflict in Syria is complex and multifaceted, but, without an increased focus on diplomatic efforts and a credible plan for de-escalation, the conflict will continue. It would be helpful if the Minister, in his response, could expand on what will happen over the next few weeks in terms of the broader strategy. The Foreign Affairs Council in Europe has met to discuss the possibility of taking further action. Can the Minister provide any update on what form that could take? What efforts are being made to restore the diplomatic process to seek a political solution?

The national and international security situation presents ever-evolving challenges and threats to the UK. Our nation's defences are facing unprecedented challenges. These recent events have brought into sharp focus the urgent need for the Government to make strategic defence decisions, taking into account UK defence capabilities and operational requirements.

The recruitment and retention in our Armed Forces can be described as nothing short of a crisis. The overall offer to service personnel is continuing to fall under this Government. That is having a devastating effect on recruitment and on retention. The National Audit Office report published earlier this week found that the Armed Forces are experiencing their biggest staffing shortfall for a decade, including—worryingly—a recruitment crisis among intelligence analysts. I was struck by the warning from General Sir Richard Barrons, the former commander of the Joint Forces Command, who said,

“you can either stop denying that defence is unable to deliver the things it is required to deliver, or you are going to watch it fail”.

That is a terrible indictment.

Our capabilities must reflect the changing environment, with threats, as the Minister outlined in his introduction, posed by Russia, North Korea and groups such as Islamic State. The Government have to focus on what role we want our Armed Forces to play internationally and the resources that are needed to maintain the security of the UK. The Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, advised in a recent speech that Russia poses a major threat that the UK will struggle to confront without an increase in defence spending. Huge challenges for the Ministry of Defence remain, and the Government must commit to no further hollowing out of our Armed Forces and our defence capabilities.

The threats faced at home today are also unprecedented. We have to ensure that we have the right resources, the right measures and the right technology to meet those challenges. Is the Minister confident that we are effectively using the existing measures and powers that we have, including economic sanctions and protections? As well as the additional powers announced following Salisbury, will the Minister update the House on the use of existing powers such as, for example, unexplained wealth orders to tackle the flow of illicit money into the UK economy?

I also raise the role of policing in security. Our national security is protected by our exemplary Armed Forces and intelligence services, but it is also protected day in, day out, by police officers operating in our communities. When the Minister spoke at the beginning, he referred to the unprecedented attacks that we have seen in London and Manchester as well as Salisbury. The head of UK counterterrorism policing, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, warned last year that cuts to local policing could have a potentially disastrous impact on counterterrorism efforts. That point has been made on many occasions during Questions in this House by noble Lords with expertise and knowledge.

With the loss of front-line officers and with them the loss of the relationships and trust that have built up over decades of community policing teams, Mr Basu asked where that vital intelligence will come from. He said:

“All the work we’ve done over the last 20 years to put neighbourhood policing back on the map ... is in danger of disappearing. For me, that is a national security issue.”

Since 2010, we have lost 21,000 police officers, 18,000 police staff and 6,800 police community officers, in addition to the reduction in the support of a number of armed officers. Last month, the independent Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary reported that policing is under “significant stress”. On occasions, that stress stretches some forces to such an extent that they risk being unable to keep people safe in some very important areas of policing. These things are not independent. What happens here at home, in our Armed Forces and internationally are all interdependent and interrelated. These pressures should concern us all.

The UK and the US intelligence forces this week issued a joint alert on the campaign of hostile cyberactivity by Russian state-sponsored actors. The Minister is nodding at me, so I welcome that he recognises that. Cybersecurity has been the focus of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting this week. But questions remain and the Government need to address them to give us the reassurance that we need. What are they doing to review the resources, and increase them if required, for the growing cyber threats? The Intelligence and Security Committee reported concerns over the ability of the intelligence services to recruit and retain critically important technical staff. Without those staff we cannot address the threats that we face. What is being undertaken now to ensure that the services have the personnel they need?

The first duty of any Government is to protect their citizens, but we also need to consider the wider international implications and how we can best fulfil our role in supporting the UN, our European partners and others in providing for international peace and stability.

12.03 pm

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, and the shadow Leader of the House, with both of whom I am in substantial agreement. I go back to the issue of Syria, which was the catalyst for bringing forward this important debate. With the benefit of hindsight, I am

able to rehearse a number of propositions perhaps beyond those that have already been discussed that establish the lawfulness of what took place.

First, Assad used chemical weapons on Douma but he had done so before. This was a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria was a signatory in 2013. The Assad regime ignored the warning available in September 2013, although the prospect of action was aborted. The use of chemical weapons is a breach of the law of conflict and humanitarian law. As a signatory to the convention, the United Kingdom has a legitimate interest in its enforcement. Of course, as had already been said, the Security Council, for reasons of Russian policy, has been effectively emasculated.

In the course of Monday’s discussion, the noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris of Aberavon, raised the issue of responsibility to protect. That doctrine was first enunciated by Prime Minister Blair in his Chicago speech; it was refined thereafter, particularly by the Canadian Government. It was successful in Kosovo—as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris, indicated—and Sierra Leone. Although it may not be universally accepted, in the circumstances we are describing, I believe it can legitimately be described as “persuasive”.

A combination of these circumstances has been extremely unusual. My question, which may not be susceptible to an answer today, is this: what is the position if, in the next six weeks, the Assad regime once again mobilises helicopters and drops barrel bombs filled with high explosive that kill and maim more people and cause more damage than anything that occurred in Douma? If these circumstances arise, they will pose a challenge not only to the Government but to those of us who have supported the action taken by them.

Let me turn to some of the broader issues. This debate is an extremely broad canvas, to put it mildly, and in the time available, I am not sure that I can colour it all in. I must therefore be selective. Looking at the number of noble Lords with experience and qualifications who will follow me, I have no doubt that any omissions I make will be more than made up for by their contributions.

The national security capability review was published on 28 March, on the eve of the recess. It got very little national coverage. Things are usually published on the eve of a recess because they contain bad news. I can give the Government some relief, because it contained no bad news. In fact, it contained not very much at all. When examined, the document is heavy on ambition but light on substance. It tells us a great deal of what we already knew or could have reasonably predicted. The approach of the review has already been criticised by the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, of which I have the honour of being a member. That criticism centres on how we can make judgments about the overall issue of national security while the defence component is absent. We know why that is so, but it seems to argue strongly for the view that we will be able best to understand the content and effectiveness of the capability review once defence issues have been properly resolved.

[LORD CAMPBELL OF PITTENWEEM]

I appreciate that security depends on more than defence—including soft power, intelligence and counter-terrorism—but I would argue that defence is unique because it is the public demonstration of will, capability and deterrence. If all three services are short of personnel, as the review suggests, part of what we are expecting to be told at the end of June by the Secretary of State for Defence must include some effort to deal with those shortages.

But one issue raised by the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, that causes me considerable concern is the changing nature of the nuclear environment and the weakening, as he said, of arms control. But it is not just Russia. In the United States, the comprehensive test-ban treaty has not yet been ratified. There is considerable doubt whether the Trump Administration will be willing to sign a follow-on strategic arms reduction treaty. As has been pointed out, the Russians have effectively given up on the INF Treaty—that rather improbable product of the meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan. Indeed, it is not just nuclear, because Russia has effectively given up the CFE—the conventional forces in Europe treaty.

But there is one more pernicious doctrine abroad in the whole question of arms control and nuclear weapons. It is called de-escalation, but it is not what it seems. It amounts to reduced nuclear payloads being put on existing missiles, such as those nuclear-capable missiles that have now been deployed in Kaliningrad. It therefore embraces, if not directly at least by inference, the use of nuclear weapons as battlefield weapons—nuclear war fighting. Noble Lords will remember that that was one of the threats of the Cold War. The United States of America hinted that there would be a more general application of the deterrence of nuclear weapons in its own security review. In Russia, military generals have been willing to accept, if I might put it that way, the possibility of the same.

That naturally leads me to the United States. We have not an exclusive relationship but a particular one, just as Macron and Trump have a particular relationship. The features of our relationship are well known: intelligence sharing and access to the Trident missile pool; we are each other's ally of first choice; a senior partnership in NATO. But we are beholden to an occasionally incoherent and often volatile President. There is not much mention these days of the pivot to the East, which caused so much anxiety in Europe when it was first pronounced by Secretary of State Clinton, but America now sees China as a competitor. The President is embarked on a rather improbable initiative relating to North Korea. It can reasonably be argued that, so far as the United States is concerned, its interests may continue to be focused more often in the East than they are in Europe.

Every President leaves a mark on the presidency. I believe that it is wrong to assume that President Trump's successor, from either party, will be drawn by or be willing to embrace the Atlanticist tradition. Given the state of politics in United States, it is more likely that such a successor will owe a great deal towards populism. That is why we must do more for ourselves and along with our European allies, whether in NATO or the European Union. PESCO,

as noble Lords will know, seeks to improve the effectiveness of the European collective contribution to NATO. The United Kingdom should lead that initiative by the nature of the budget we are prepared to pay for defence. To do so would provide a commitment not just to trade but to the security relationship with the European Union, which has not yet been determined but on which the capability review places great stress. We need more capability for the United Kingdom, Europe and for NATO. If we do that we will allay the issue of burden sharing, which is alive in Washington in the Senate, the House and the White House.

I believe that 2% is not enough for the United Kingdom's defence budget. That has been so particularly since the cost of the nuclear deterrent became part of the defence budget rather than being separately financed.

Having begun my speech with Syria, perhaps I can finish with Syria. I find myself in the position of being like a sinner who is about to repent but who cannot quite bring himself to do so. The reason why I take this position is that it is now beyond doubt that Assad will win this civil war. It is beyond doubt that he did not and does not need to use chemical weapons. It is beyond doubt that he will continue to enjoy unequivocal support from Russia because of Russia's anxiety to maintain the influence it has garnered from the vacuum left by what one might describe as the West and because of its bases at Latakia and Tartus, which give it direct access to the Mediterranean. As part of the forward thinking that must surely be provoked by these discussions, Syria is—one might argue—an essential component of our foreign policy in the future. We will have to reshape our policy in relation to Syria and to Assad and we should not shrink from that either.

12.16 pm

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, this debate could hardly be more timely, coming as it does just a month after the publication of the Government's national security capability review and following hard on the heels of the employment of chemical agents in Syria and the UK. I am pleased that, among all of our national convulsions over Brexit, we are, for a brief time at least, able to discuss the perilous global situation in which we find ourselves and the responses with which we might best counter the challenges we face.

Let me start with the security capability review itself. It makes a number of obvious points with which it is hard to argue. It is somewhat less convincing, however, when it comes to the "so what?" questions that flow from its analysis. I will touch on just a few of these. The first relates to the "fusion doctrine", which I assume is what used to be known as the "comprehensive approach" in a new guise. The proposition that the UK should react to security challenges with a coherent, cross-disciplinary response that utilises all elements of power, soft and hard, in an appropriate mix is, of course, indisputable. The problem, though, is that Whitehall is not really very good at this. During the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it took a lot of time and effort to get the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development working together effectively. The *ad-hoc*

processes and individual relationships that went into making the endeavour successful did not, by and large, endure beyond those campaigns.

If the new doctrine is to be successful, and not just the whim of the year, it will require a fundamental shift in culture, as the security capability review itself acknowledges. However, a change of culture is one of the most difficult things to achieve: it takes sustained effort over many years and a system of rewards and sanctions that drive behaviour. A senior responsible official, while helpful, will not achieve this fundamental shift. Can the Minister tell the House how such a change in culture is to be driven and, most importantly, assessed across Whitehall over the long term?

Turning now to external issues, I sense a degree of schizophrenia in the capability review when it comes to China. Much is made of our commitment to a rules-based international system. China seems to acquiesce in such a system only if it gets to make up the rules itself. It has engaged in the theft of intellectual property on a massive scale, and it uses its increasing economic and industrial strength to leverage its own interests—not unreasonably—from a Chinese perspective. However, the capability review merely notes:

“Competition between states ... including in the South China Sea, brings risks of miscalculation and conflict”.

It goes on to note, somewhat laconically:

“We have established a global comprehensive strategic partnership with China”.

What exactly is this strategic partnership? How are we balancing our engagement with China and our need for its investment with the protection of our national infrastructure and the wider observance of international rules and norms? There are clearly tensions here that it seems to me give rise to fundamental questions that the security capability review has ducked. I should be grateful if the Minister provided some enlightenment on this crucial matter.

There is, though, one strand running through the review that is both clear and compelling, although it raises more questions than it answers. In chapter after chapter, the review emphasises the importance of finding ways to partner effectively with the EU once we leave. I could not agree more. As I have said on previous occasions, our security in these islands has always been inextricably linked with the security of the rest of Europe, and no referendum can change that. We need urgently to agree with the EU a method of consulting and co-operating on a wide range of security and defence issues, and that means a method of consulting and co-operating on foreign policy matters more widely. This needs to be an ongoing and enduring process. Coming together just at times of crisis will not enable us to respond effectively to, let alone pre-empt, the common challenges we will face. The national security capability review sets out the requirement in stark terms but offers no solutions. Will the Minister tell the House what work is under way to provide the mechanisms and processes that are urgently needed to underpin our security in this regard?

I turn now to the burning issue of state-based threats within Europe, from Russia in particular. The capability review rightly highlights the considerable and increasing risks of conflict, but it is less clear on

the strategy for dealing with this. There has been much talk of a new Cold War, but this is a misreading of the situation. We in the West do not face an ideological foe bent on global revolution, as was the case with the Soviet Union. We face a gangster regime that has plundered its own country for individual gain and seeks to increase its international stature and power by equally unsavoury means. How do we respond to such a challenge? First, it seems to me that we need to take a long view here. Our ultimate strategic objective should be a Russia that lives comfortably with its neighbours, adheres to accepted international norms and is a responsible member of the wider international community. It is therefore important that we continue to engage with Russia as and when we can and maintain channels of communication, even in times of great stress.

On the other hand, we need to be clear that certain behaviours simply cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. We need to be absolutely clear about our responses if we are to lower the risk of miscalculation. The bottom line in this regard must be our commitment to NATO and our undiminished support for Article 5. NATO must demonstrate its capability and resolve when it comes to the territorial defence of its members, and the UK should lead the way in this. Russia must be left in no doubt of the utmost seriousness with which we view the matter. Meanwhile, we must strengthen our capabilities to deal with asymmetric threats, particularly in cyberspace and in the various social strata of our nations. The UK has made a good start in this but still has a lot of catching up to do. More shadowy Russian actions outside these spheres will require more nuanced responses. These will not necessarily be effective in changing Russian behaviour in the short term, but the mere fact of a response is nevertheless important. Of crucial importance is the need to maintain a high degree of international unity in the face of Russian challenges, which only serves to underline the importance of the co-ordination and co-operation mechanisms within Europe to which I referred earlier.

One very difficult and pertinent matter which requires urgent thought is how the international community should approach the use of chemical weapons. We need to decide if the nature of these weapons and the requirement to sustain the Chemical Weapons Convention justify a coercive or retributive response to their use. If they do, that should be as part of a wider strategic programme of action to minimise the risk of chemical attacks and to punish them more comprehensively when they occur. One-off military responses may send a signal about our opposition to such weapons, but are unlikely by themselves to deter their use. This is an issue on which the security capability review is unhelpfully silent.

Finally, I remind the House of some of the words and phrases used by the Prime Minister in her introduction to the review, where she sets out what has changed since 2015:

“threats have continued to intensify and evolve and we face a range of complex challenges ... the resurgence of state-based threats ... the undermining of the international rules based order; the rise in cyber-attacks ... the increase in threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability”.

[LORD STIRRUP]

Well, quite. That is an accurate and very worrying picture of what is happening in our world. One must ask, though: how has all this affected our investment priorities in the UK? The answer seems to be not at all. The defence budget has been shown to be inadequate to meet the aims of the 2015 review, let alone to cope with the increased threats and challenges set out so clearly by the Prime Minister.

A strategy is truly a strategy only if it matches objectives with resources. It is simply no good parroting old tropes, as the national security capability review does, about a minimum of 2% of GDP being committed to defence, and about a 0.5% real-terms annual increase in spending. It should hardly be a source of great national pride that we have just avoided breaching NATO's absolute minimum spending requirement, and a 0.5% annual increment is clearly not enough; nor is comparing our position to the delinquents in the alliance a strategic response to the challenges of the world.

We are in danger from a range of complex and growing threats; on that, I entirely agree with the Prime Minister. What is required now is not mere reorganisation and rebranding, but a programme of investment commensurate with those threats. Only then will we have a national security strategy worth the name.

12.27 pm

Lord Owen (Ind SD): My Lords, I welcome the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting here in London. Post Brexit, it presents an opportunity for this country to deepen further our relationships with the Commonwealth, in trade of course but not just in economic measures—in diplomacy in the UN, particularly through the UN Security Council debates; and in defence, where I see one part of the deployment of our new aircraft carriers being beyond the Suez Canal, as a UN rapid-reaction maritime force where those carriers will need accompanying vessels. Those could easily come—with enthusiasm, I think—from the Australian, New Zealand and, I hope, Indian navies.

There are three dangerous potential military crises on the international agenda: North Korean nuclear weapons; eastern Europe, focused on Ukraine; and the Middle East, focused on Syria. Any or all of these could bubble over into serious military conflict. North Korea is of concern to the UK. This is not some far-distant problem. We contributed militarily to the conflict which started in June 1950 and lost many lives. We now know that it was a proxy war. In Moscow in April 1950, Stalin had given the green light to North Korea to start it, as did Mao in Beijing in May, but for years the Chinese and Russians went through a public ritual of blaming each other for starting the war. Both were surprised by the US intervention over Korea in 1950 and by the support that it had from the UK. The UK decided on early recognition of China in 1950 and it was a carefully thought out position, one of which Clement Attlee was rightly proud.

President Trump on Korea has been far better than many of his predecessors. It was a wise decision to ask President Xi to the US so early in his tenure in April last year, and the men have met many times since and

taken the measure of each other. Mike Pompeo's secret visit is extremely encouraging, especially since he will be the US Secretary of State very soon, I hope. Many people in Europe and the US who make justified criticism of President Trump's handling of foreign affairs should remember that secrecy is an extremely important part of international diplomacy, as is the clear and concise linkage between the use of force and the importance of negotiation. It is necessary that President Trump and President Putin should meet, as soon as possible, to discuss these two very difficult issues of Syria and Ukraine.

Churchill did not say that jaw, jaw is better than war, war. He said: "Meeting jaw to jaw is better than war", which is a far more toughly worded explanation of why we must always be open to negotiation while preparing for war. But secrecy and co-ordination with colleagues is vital in any defence strategy, and the Prime Minister was absolutely right to use the prerogative powers on this most recent incident. We should be quite clear about it: prerogative powers for international negotiations are an essential. I wish that some of the diplomats who speak in this House frequently would reflect on that in the appalling problems we are making for the Government in their negotiating of Brexit. Even under the infamous Article 50, there has to be some measure of secrecy, flexibility and give and take in any negotiations.

We need to rapidly rethink our problems with Syria. We have made three interventions over chemical weapons, correctly. First, there was Secretary of State Kerry's and Foreign Minister Lavrov's initiative to remove large supplies of sarin gas from Syria in 2013, which was far more effective than any pinprick bombing. Secondly, there was the 2017 intervention by President Trump when sarin gas was used, which demonstrated that Russia had either deliberately or inadvertently accepted some sarin gas remaining in Syria. Thirdly, there was the recent co-ordinated action on the use of gas. Of course, chlorine was not included in the 2017 negotiation. But in Syria, we now have a far more dangerous problem: the proven existence of Iranian military forces with drones in Syria, with the real probability that they are in Lebanon as well. We cannot continue to take the same attitude to Iran until it is persuaded to bring its forces back. Iran is not an aggressive nation, historically, but it is an aggressive act to deploy in Syria—particularly since Iraq now has a Shia Prime Minister and the majority in Iraq form the Government of that country. Iran no longer faces the threat that it did from Saddam Hussein and the Sunni minority that was in control of Iraq for many decades.

To come to Europe and defence, for a post-Brexit Britain the challenge is abundantly clear. It has to make an urgent decision—I am surprised it has not already been made by this Government—to increase our defence spending from 2% to, at the very least, 2.5% and as soon as possible up to 3%. President Macron said a few days ago in the European Parliament, "We share so much"—he meant with America, but he said that it is "rejecting multilateralism". He said he was convinced that this model is more important than ever but it is "very fragile". America as a whole is not rejecting multilateralism and I am not convinced Trump

is either. It is up to us in Europe to demonstrate to the US that we will match its NATO commitment. On this Britain should take a lead, and urgently. It is important to remember that successive US Presidents have warned us that we must give a commitment to NATO if they are to persuade their people to give such a commitment. The US pays over 70% of NATO's bills. This is freeloading and it was Obama who first warned us that we were doing that. Trump has reiterated it and they are both correct.

There is only one serious multilateral defence organisation in the world, and that is NATO. Anyone, anywhere who damages that is threatening international peace. This country now faces a serious decision over defence policy post Brexit. There can be no doubt whatever that we will remove ourselves from the External Action Service immediately we leave in April 2019. That External Action Service has not been a great success. Its contribution to the fighting in Ukraine through the EU-Ukraine agreement has already been commented on in Select Committee reports in this House, and I will go no further on that.

What could we do to link NATO well with the foreign policy and overall security policy of the EU when it has 27 members? That is a very serious issue. We should not rush into it; we need to gather our thoughts. An example of what we might consider is talking with our friends in NATO who are not members of the EU: Norway, Iceland and Turkey. There is no more difficult problem than how to keep Turkey in NATO. It was extremely encouraging that President Erdoğan came out in support of the action that the US, UK and France took in Syria. It is not proving easy, and there are difficult relations between the US and Turkey. They are greatly strained at the moment. There is a strong case for considering the establishment of a NATO-EU permanent joint council—a PJC—of NATO non-EU members and NATO EU members. It needs to be small if it is to be effective. A council composed of Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK might make very good sense, but it is up to NATO to choose its group and the EU to choose its group. That would be the sort of linkage that we might look to post Brexit. Were that to be established, we would have no case for staying in the EU's permanent structured co-operation on security and defence—PESCO—or for being involved in the EU's co-ordinated annual review on defence—CARD—which aims to build up European defence planning, or the European defence fund. That raises difficult problems for us as we want joint procurement bilaterally, on a European basis or with the US. That flexibility has served us well. A lot of our Armed Forces' sophisticated weaponry is due to industrial production agreements with US manufacturers, and we should not put ourselves in a situation where we believe there is merit in Europe being self-sufficient.

This is a troubled and difficult time. This debate is well timed. There needs to be great thought about how we proceed, but we should not underrate the importance of Putin and Trump meeting very soon. The trade-offs in Syria have to come with benefit to Russia. The trade-offs in Ukraine have to come with benefit to the United States.

12.37 pm

The Lord Bishop of Coventry: My Lords, I, too, am grateful to the Minister for bringing this debate forward at this pivotal time in our national security and foreign policy. It is a great honour to follow the noble Lord, Lord Owen, and other distinguished speakers with their panoramic perspectives. Given the timing of the debate, I shall offer some reflections on the Syrian situation, both the danger it represents for national security and the role it might play in recasting relations with Russia, even in the stressful times described so clearly by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup.

The risk that Syria poses to national security is beyond doubt. A seven-year war has, as we have heard, produced massive displacement of people and placed pressure on Europe as refugees flee the violence. Regional and international powers, with their different strategic aims, are fighting a proxy war, and the spectre of clashes between Israel and Iran hangs over the conflict. There is the ideological contamination and the political ambitions of Daesh and a multitude of jihadist groups populated by Syrians—some of them radicalised, often through the cruelty of the regime—and foreign fighters. There are allied strikes, with Russian retaliation threatened. And all the while, there is the moral outrage of the untold suffering of the Syrian people.

In the last debate in your Lordships' House before the Easter Recess, a debate on the humanitarian crisis in Syria, I said that,

“history is on the side of hope”.—[*Official Report*, 29/03/18; col. 957.]

Despite the recent turn of events, I still hold faith in hope, and I dare to suggest that our continued diplomatic efforts to end the war in Syria, to which the Prime Minister recommitted the Government in her Statement, may be an opportunity to mobilise the diplomatic and global reach that the Minister referred to, not only to save Syrians from more suffering but to improve the state of UK/Russia relations. Could it just be that the cause of peace in Syria offers a chance to recast relations with Russia away from confrontation towards co-operation, beginning to rekindle trust?

We know that, crudely perhaps, the UK and Russia have been working with different narratives over Syria. They are projections of the contrasting stories that I hear from the Syrian people themselves. The Syrian refugees that I meet in Coventry, good people who stood on the side of a noble reach for freedom, suffered terribly at the regime's hands and can see no future for their country with Assad. That is the side that we took, again for noble reasons. Other Syrians whose testimonies that I hear, and I heard some more this week, have been so traumatised by the fear of chaos and the threat of jihadi control and cruelty that, even if they held out some hope for the rebellion in its early days, now long for stability at all costs and can see no future for Syria without Assad. That is the side that Russia has taken, and it has invested heavily in that outcome—and, as we have heard, that serves its strategic interests. Stated in that form, the two narratives sound irreconcilable, but they have a deep point of connection that is ultimately for peace, stability and a future that, for the Syrian people, is genuinely in their hands and that, for the UK, Russia and other nations, does not risk further, even military, confrontation between them.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF COVENTRY]

The Geneva and Astana peace processes testify that a desire for a lasting peace is a common cause of both narratives. If the same diplomatic energy and skill used by the US, the UK and France to conduct missile strikes last week is deployed to focus on jointly bringing the conflict to a close, not only are we fulfilling the moral imperative of ending the suffering of Syrian people but we are beginning a work of repair on UK/Russian relations, strengthening them as trust grows in pursuit of a common objective. The principles governing the UK military action—that it was primarily humanitarian, that it was not seeking regime change, that it was not an assault on Russian interests—offer the sort of approach that could allow a common cause to arise. The Astana process has not delivered peace, and without Russia, Turkey and Iran the Geneva process is flawed. Are Her Majesty's Government working with the US and other partners and protagonists to bring together the two separate peace processes that, as they stand, seem to reinforce rather than reconcile the narratives?

A new way is needed that gathers the international players under one roof behind closed doors, without grandstanding, where the reality of the situation can be faced and whatever makes for the cessation of violence, secures a semblance of stability to Syria and removes the risk of the conflict spiralling into regional or global conflict is agreed. Given Russia's stake in the Syrian war and the ongoing threat of jihadist terror, hard choices will need to be made about Assad's future, as we have heard, but, at the same time, tough deals struck over whatever transitional arrangements will lay out a route to Syria determining its own future.

After Aleppo and east Ghouta, it is clear that another theatre with catastrophic potential is looming: Idlib. It raises the sharp issues mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Campbell. How is a bloodbath in Idlib, with its risks of escalation, to be avoided? Could even Idlib become a means of reworking international relationships, a chance, even at this stage, to inject a humanitarian logic into the military logic, to secure corridors of safety for civilians, to require forms of warfare that accord with international norms?

The Government have faced unenviable moral and military decisions over the past week. Their appeal has been to defend humanity in Syria and beyond from the scourge of chemical weapons. The humanitarian instinct to preserve people from unspeakable suffering must now drive renewed efforts for an end to conflict and the beginning of stability, conducted with the sort of energy, skill and resolve shown in the military action. Without that, our claims to serve the best interests of humanity will sound hollow and be judged wanting, and our national security will continue to face a major threat.

12.47 pm

Baroness Neville-Jones (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate, who has just laid out some of the issues that we face over Syria, which are very difficult. I also welcome the tough-minded clarity that my noble friend the Minister showed in his remarks on the threat posed by Russia.

I do not envy the task faced by the modern policymaker on national security. As others have said, we face a fast-shifting scene in which there are few obvious anchorages for a country such as ours. The international scene has greatly changed since Madeleine Albright's short-lived "unipolar moment"—do noble Lords remember that? It has moved in a direction which is to the significant disadvantage of the West—which I think is still a useful and valid term—and in ways which I think are increasingly downright hostile to some of our fundamental interests. I very much fear that movement in that direction has still further to go. The picture is sombre and dangerous.

International terrorism is with us for the foreseeable future. As the right reverend Prelate just pointed out, the Middle East is in turmoil and heading in directions which are both dangerous for it and capable of sparking much wider conflagration. We should not forget how tense and fragile that area is. Europe in particular faces immediate and increasing aggressive activity on the part of Russia, as has been well said, which has spent its national capital on developing hybrid military capability and nuclear capabilities which, in the absence of much else, it shows an alarming tendency to want to use and exploit. It intends to do us harm inside our societies as well as externally. We should not forget that national security these days has to do with the integrity of our political systems as well as our safety. Declining powers—and Russia is a declining power—can do a lot of damage on their way down.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, mentioned China, and I want to say a little something about that. It is the other major autocracy, but the challenge it poses is much more complex, long-term and, frankly, important, even than Russia. If we do not meet it, we will not only fundamentally change, or allow the change of, the current international power balance but undo the western-originated framework of international laws and institutions that have been built up, essentially by the West, since the Second World War and under whose umbrella we shelter today. This is, as has been well said, the international law-abiding framework that we have at the moment. I will come back to that.

In deciding how the UK should respond to the challenges that it faces, we cannot escape a fundamental question about our own behaviour as a nation: do we want to be an active player, or do we basically want to opt out? I am not really getting at Brexit with this, much as I think there are elements of it that weaken our hand, but for me two events spell out the worry that I have. The UK suffered, as we know, an unprovoked, lawless and highly dangerous attack from Russia on our domestic soil—not in some far-off place but here, in Salisbury. We received from our allies very considerable backing and a display of solidarity, which has greatly strengthened our hand in dealing with the aftermath—and aftermath there will be; we are far from finished with this story.

In this context, I wish that the National Cyber Security Centre had not waited until now to make known to a wider audience its concerns about Russian penetration of our networks, with the implicit threat of a forthcoming cyberattack on our critical national infrastructure. Cocooning people from the risks that they face until they become imminent does no service.

People who live in ignorance will harbour a false sense of security, are likely to be less resilient to attack than they could and should be and will undervalue the help that they receive from others.

This is my point: the polling on the UK's military participation in upholding the international ban on the use of chemical weapons in Syria shows uncomfortably lukewarm popular support for UK participation. I know that some people will say that that had to do with the question of consulting Parliament; that is true, but only up to a point. There are elements to it and it betokens a lack of trust in government—I am not talking about this Government, but government generally—for some time on the part of the public. It needs to be fixed by much more frank discussion than we get about the issues we face.

My worry about the polling is that it tells us that the public do not seem to see that, if the UK opts out of joining its allies in defending principles it has authored and indeed upheld in the past, it will get less in return. Solidarity is reciprocal. Mr Trump may not be the nation's favourite President but, as has just been said, the United States' commitment to European security upholds our freedoms and the Prime Minister is quite right to seek to get on with him. There are some fundamentals here that we should not forget, because nobody ever influenced anybody by holding their nose.

Far from opting out, this country needs to give real substance to the slogan "global Britain". Perceptions of weakness increase the dangers we face. Being global is not primarily about new trade ties or reviving Commonwealth links, welcome as these are; it is about facing up to the real security challenges. We have done well in combating the terrorist threat and successive Governments deserve credit, though there is still much to be done on the integration front. I also endorse what has been said about the importance of policing in this context. It is not enough simply to ring-fence the counterterrorism capability in this area. We are active in helping defend the security of the NATO area against Russian provocations and harassment. Those two important contributions bear directly on our own security. But on the other hand, the UK has not been in the forefront on Ukraine, which, among other things, is about the rule of law on our own continent, and rather important. We have yet to have our cyberdefences truly tested, although I acknowledge and support the fact that serious work has been done in this area. However, we do not yet know how successful we have been.

Our growing defence relationship with France has helped us with the defence of our own shorelines and skies, but we should listen to the increasingly urgent calls of our senior officers for more money for defence. The Government tell us that it is their first duty, and my goodness, they need to make good on that. Frankly, it is hard to know where to start, but for my money I would certainly like to see a significant regrowth in the size and capability of the Royal Navy. That is because some of the greater challenges we face lie in the Far East—I come back to China. The main burden undoubtedly falls on the Americans, but there is reciprocity in all of that, and if we do not make a contribution as European allies—and we are rich enough to do so—we

cannot expect the same degree of support we have had hitherto in Europe. We also need to develop our relations with countries like Japan and South Korea.

Let us be clear about what is at stake. China is a politico-military-economic challenge. Most Europeans, the UK included, have focused on China as a marketplace—import and export. But China is making an undisguised effort to become the greatest technological power in the world. The one belt, one road initiative brings a Chinese investment strategy, which includes converting debt into equity stakes in the economies of the countries along the route—with the attendant political influence that will bring—right to the borders of Europe.

Part of maintaining our autonomy is to develop our own technological capabilities, and we are well placed to compete in several areas, provided we get on with and implement an industrial strategy worthy of the name. We have to participate in the fourth industrial revolution with every sinew we have available. It is crucial in the end to our capacity to build our national security. That agenda and national prosperity are closely related.

What we should not do, however, is fail to be hard-headed about the ownership of valuable intellectual property, the handing over of which the Chinese have made a condition of entry into their market. We have to resist this, and we should focus not just on the protection of technologies with military or dual-use capabilities but on ones with transformative economic significance. The underpinning of future power is economic, as I said, and in short, we need a strategy. Do we, as allies, talk to each other about management of relations with China? I do not think so. I grant that it is not easy, given the Trump style, although some of the measures he is taking may well yield results. Long term, however, we need a western strategy, and I do not see it. That is one of the challenges to our future strength.

What I have just been talking about is not national security in the narrower politico-military sense in which it is often used, but it is about the future organisation of the world that our offspring will inherit. The West has had it good for nigh on 70 years, with our rules and our way of life being the winning model. We cannot now take that for granted. We need to defend and promote it actively, and the UK should be there, doing its bit.

12.59 pm

Lord Morris of Aberavon (Lab): My Lords, two issues concern me today. The first is the legality of the Syrian air strikes, and I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, for his remarks. In the past, he has made important contributions in this field in the other place. One of the most painful and onerous decisions that a Prime Minister has to take is to commit British troops to an act of war. Perhaps the use of air power may be easier than committing troops on the ground. We have examples of a reluctance to do this, particularly on the part of the Americans in recent years.

Under the charter, there are two grounds for such actions. The first is self-defence and the second is a decision of the UN Security Council. In recent years and now, because of the veto, it is hopeless to expect

[LORD MORRIS OF ABERAVON]

authority from the Security Council. As the Attorney-General, I faced this problem in Kosovo, and I believe that I also drafted the rules of engagement in Sierra Leone. In Kosovo, there was abundant evidence of the need for action: evidence of large-scale ethnic cleansing, murder and rape, causing suffering to many thousands. The precedents for acting without the authority of the United Nations were few. My Conservative predecessor had advised on the setting up of no-fly zones in the Iraq war to protect the Kurds in the north and the Marsh Arabs in the south. These were passive actions on our part. Our proposed action in Kosovo for large-scale NATO raids, repeated over what I believe were 69 days, was aggressive and of a different kind from the passive action for which I had some precedents. It was aggressive action, although I was persuaded against my better judgment by the former Attorney-General, Mr Dominic Grieve, to use as a substitute the word “proactive” in my book, otherwise it might not have been published.

Our Ministers and our Armed Forces have to obey international law. They needed my advice to give them the security that they were acting legally. The Prime Minister has repeated almost word for word the three conditions for action set out in my book. The first is widespread humanitarian distress, the second is that there is no practical alternative, and the third is that the use of force has to be proportionate and, in my words, the minimum necessary to achieve our objective. She has quoted, “These are the same criteria for the legal justification for the Kosovan action”. I earnestly hope that the support of the Prime Minister will not damage my future career.

As I told the House on Monday, legal advice cannot always be certain, but I presume that the Attorney-General believed that he had a respectable legal argument or, as is sometimes said, an arguable case, which would be enough to satisfy the Armed Forces that they were acting legally. In international law, I could not go further than that. Some distinguished academic lawyers have expressed their dissent. I am comforted that that most eminent of lawyers, the late Lord Bingham, in his book *The Rule of Law*, went no further than to comment that the doctrine of overwhelming humanitarian disaster is controversial. That was the only comment he made in a detailed analysis of the law generally. Having warned my Prime Minister of the possibility of legal challenge, it transpired that I had to act as leading counsel for the United Kingdom to respond to the challenge of an action by Yugoslavia against the United Kingdom along with, I believe, eight other NATO countries as defendants, before the International Court at The Hague. It was Yugoslavia’s attempt to stop the bombing by getting an injunction so to do. To my regret, the court did not deliver judgment on the legality of our actions. I trust that the Attorney-General, in his advice to Ministers, dealt with the possibility of a challenge by a country with an appropriate status before the court.

The mischief we are dealing with is the abhorrent use of chemical weapons, banned by the consensus of the international community under the Geneva Convention protocol in 1928. Some 10 years ago, I had the pleasure of addressing the Organisation for

the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague. The spirit of the conference for maintaining the ban on chemical weapons was absolutely solid and therefore we must be very careful that there is no departure from that. The charter of the United Nations regrettably does not provide adequate cover where a wrong-doing state has the umbrella support of a veto-wielding nation. That goes to the very heart of the problem in Kosovo and now. In Cape Town 10 years ago and in St Petersburg last October, I tried to raise before the committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union the need to reform the charter of the United Nations. That was a bridge too far for other countries, and perhaps ourselves.

My second point concerns the need for the approval of the House of Commons. Given the heavy build-up of briefing over seven days, the element of surprise would not have been lost in any event. They would have lost nothing except the grim possibility of losing the vote in the House of Commons if it were consulted. This is the real reason the House of Commons was not consulted. In February 2006, Lord Mayhew of Twysden and I, both former Attorney-Generals, gave evidence to your Lordships’ Constitution Committee. At the time it was engaged in investigating evidence for its report, *Waging War: Parliament’s Role and Responsibility*. We both came to the conclusion that the use of the royal prerogative to go to war, save in exceptional circumstances and emergencies, was outdated. We agreed that the consent of the House of Commons should be required first. The committee accepted our advice. A convention was established by the decisions of three Prime Ministers, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, to consult the House of Commons. Given that committing our Armed Forces is so fundamental, I do not believe that the Government were right to put the convention to one side and not get the support of the House of Commons.

I end with what I believe was the most important statement made in the debate in the other place: what next?

1.07 pm

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield (CB): My Lords, I declare my interests as listed in the register. I should like to concentrate on the Government’s *National Security Capability Review*, which was published on 28 March. In my judgment, it is a document of considerable significance for two reasons, one of them explicit and the other implicit. I shall deal with the explicit reason first, which, among other things, has direct resonance for the Syrian operation last Saturday.

Little noticed in the rather scant media coverage of the capability review was the declaration that its proposed new way of making policy and reaching decisions on overseas and defence policy would be “Chilcot compliant”—those are the exact words. In other words, the review has absorbed the lessons of the 2003 Iraq war as laid out in the July 2016 Chilcot report. Chilcot compliance rests on the so-called “Chilcot checklist”, which regrettably is not set out in the capability review but can be found as an appendix to the Government’s response of 10 January 2018 to the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs report on Chilcot. It contains 10 items, and in my judgment

they comprise an important element in assessing the processes by which the Prime Minister, the National Security Council and her Cabinet reached the decision that the RAF Tornados should unleash their cruise missiles in the early hours of 14 April. It is the first time that a substantial politico-military decision has been taken by a British Government against the backdrop of a checklist or anything like it.

Perhaps I may offer a swift summary of the Chilcot checklist. The first is vision: why do we care; what does this mean for British interests; what are the results of acting or doing nothing? Secondly, analysis: what is happening now; what are your sources of ground truth/evidence; have assumptions been exposed to analytical tools or external challenge? Thirdly, scenario: what might happen next? Fourthly, options: what should we do? Fifthly, legal implications: how do we ensure that action is lawful; how will you ensure that any legal basis remains sound if circumstances change? Sixthly, policy and strategy: what does success look like? Seventhly, resources: what do we need to deliver? Eighthly, planning and doing: have you planned for a range of possible contingencies? Ninthly, policy performance: how will you measure and evaluate success/failure? Tenthly, evaluation: is the policy working?

Did Her Majesty's Government follow their own prescriptions in the aftermath of the appalling chemical attack on Douma? When we debated the Prime Minister's Statement in the Chamber on Monday, I put this question to the noble Baroness the Leader of the House. She replied:

"I can certainly assure the noble Lord that the lessons from the Chilcot report have been learned and we have paid attention to it".—[*Official Report*, 16/10/18; col. 1034.]

Perhaps the noble Earl the Minister, when he winds up, can elaborate a little on this point.

Maybe surprisingly, the Chilcot checklist is silent on the key question of whether the House of Commons should have a pre-attack debate and vote. Here, as the Leader of the House made plain on Monday, the Government's decision not to hold such a debate was based on a passage contained in the *The Cabinet Manual: A Guide to Laws, Conventions and Rules on the Operation of Government*. The key paragraph in the manual is as follows:

"In 2011, the Government acknowledged that a convention had developed in Parliament that before troops were committed the House of Commons should have an opportunity to debate the matter and said that it proposed to observe that convention except when there was an emergency and such action would not be appropriate".

The Prime Minister, as it were, invoked the emergency clause to justify putting the convention aside in this instance.

In my view, although all my instincts lean towards the desirability of pre-attack debates and votes, the Prime Minister has a case over last weekend's strike in Syria, even though I am sure she would have secured House of Commons approval had she taken the question to MPs ahead of the attack. There will now be a wider debate—it has already started—on the constitution and military action, with the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour shadow Cabinet pressing for a war

powers Act. However, I am sure that, even if Parliament passed such a measure, it too would have an emergency clause embedded in it.

A first step on which perhaps we can all agree could be the bringing together of all the papers, paragraphs and checklists that deal with this hugely important question into a single document. I would value the Minister's thoughts on that when he replies.

I suggested a moment ago that there was a significant implicit ingredient running through the pages of the *National Security Capability Review*. It is, I think, the recognition—here I disagree, although I am reluctant to do so, with the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup—that we are entering the fifth year of the second cold war, which began in March 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea. Naturally it is different from what the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, recently called the "classic Cold War". Its context is different, the ideological clash has mutated, although not entirely, into something else, and the instruments are changed, as are the metrics—for example, what level does a Russian cyberattack have to reach before it triggers Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty?

However, there is one grim and dangerous continuity between Cold War I and cold war II: the possibility of a serious unintended escalation. I recently re-read the paper on escalation which the Joint Intelligence Committee produced in the weeks following the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. It examined what it called,

"the process by which any hostilities, once started, might expand in scope and intensity, with or without the consent of Governments".

The misreading of each other's intentions that might trigger unintended conflict is very much the worry of our own times.

What we need is cool and careful thinking from today's equivalents of the great George Kennan in the early years of the first Cold War, out of which came the doctrine of "containment". For I fear that this cold war, like its predecessor, will be a long haul, requiring care, wisdom and nerve-keeping of the highest order. Those of us who grew up in the first Cold War under the shadow of the bomb, as children of the uranium age, know just how difficult and delicate is the task of containment. It is crucial that successor generations find the level of patience and foresight required to rise to the level of events.

1.14 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, threats and challenges to the United Kingdom's national security are more geographically diverse and complex than at any time in recent memory. Our resilience, our alliances and our capabilities are being tested on a daily basis in the Middle East, in north Africa, on NATO's eastern flank, in the western Balkans and in Asia by states such as Russia, by cyber-capable countries such as North Korea, China and Iran, and by terrorist networks such as ISIS.

I welcome and support the Prime Minister's decision to take military action against the Assad regime for its latest use of chemical weapons. I had the privilege of working in the coalition Government and I had many opportunities to work with the then Home Secretary. I know that she would not have taken the decision to

[BARONESS HELIC]

intervene militarily lightly and that her guiding principle would have been the UK's national interest, not anyone's tweet or whim.

I have been disappointed by the extent to which some have been prepared to doubt the Prime Minister and the assessment of our intelligence agencies, and, in the same breath, to gullibly buy into Russian propaganda and disinformation. Our intelligence agencies work on our behalf around the clock to keep this country safe, and, from my experience, they do so with the utmost integrity and with a deep personal and institutional commitment to the United Kingdom's values and the law.

I hope that the strikes in Syria inflicted damage on the regime's ability to mount chemical attacks and on its sense of impunity. However, to succeed in Syria we must go well beyond surgical strikes. There has to be a comprehensive strategy for Syria and for the region. I hope that the Minister will share the Government's plan and thinking in this regard.

I put it to the Minister that if our aims are to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and prevent the use of these weapons in future conflicts, the ultimate deterrent would be the sight of Syrian leaders in the dock, facing prosecution for their actions. Can the Minister assure the House that the UK will not support a peace process that includes amnesty for war crimes in Syria, which include not only the use of chemical weapons but the regime's policy of sieges, starvation, barrel bombs, attacks on hospitals and the systematic use of rape and sexual violence? That is not to mention almost half a million Syrians who have perished over the last seven years and millions who have been displaced. As Human Rights Watch put it yesterday, accountability should not be "bargained away" in peace talks.

We are all aware that Russia is using its Security Council veto to block the referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. However, given that the UN General Assembly has proved willing to set up an international, impartial and independent mechanism to investigate war crimes in Syria, does the Minister see any possibility of a further resolution in the General Assembly to establish a special ad hoc tribunal for Syria?

I note that the United Kingdom has provided £200,000 towards the start-up costs of the investigative mechanism. Given that its estimated budget for 2018 is \$14 million, I hope that our Government will be prepared to increase their funding significantly. I hope too that if there is any scope for the UK to pursue prosecutions of war crimes in Syria through our domestic courts, under universal jurisdiction, the Government will wholeheartedly pursue all such avenues. This is not only a moral issue and an issue of human dignity but a question of national security, since Syria will not be stable over the long term without some measure of justice and accountability.

To all those who consider that to be Utopian thinking, I point to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Not only was the tribunal set up while the war was ongoing in 1993 but it eventually brought to justice many of those responsible for war crimes. Even Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, who was

one of the signatories of the Dayton peace accords and therefore as seemingly untouchable as Assad may appear to be today, died in The Hague facing prosecution.

Sadly, Russian aggression and disruption have found bedfellows in other parts of the world beyond Damascus. In the western Balkans, Russia has driven a coach and horses through the decades of hard work and commitment that we and our allies put into stabilising the region. Russia has blatantly infiltrated and corrupted institutions and, in some cases, political leaders there. Yet the strategic myopia and political inertia of the European Union has served the region to the Kremlin on a silver plate. General Wesley Clark, who commanded NATO troops in the Balkans in the 1990s, recently wrote:

"The Russians are working to foment anti-EU and anti-NATO sentiment. They are supporting extremist groups and dispensing targeted military aid".

He went on to say:

"The Kremlin has also fanned the flames of ethnic division through disinformation campaigns that pit Orthodox Christian populations against Muslims, intentionally stoking the tensions that fueled the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s".

I welcome the Western Balkans Summit that will be hosted in London in July this year. I hope that the Minister will share with the House the Government's strategy for countering Russia's actions in this region, including the information warfare that has been unleashed in the region on a scale not seen since the dark days of Stalin's assault on Yugoslavia in 1948.

In this context, I welcome the BBC's decision to reinstate the BBC World Service in Serbian. However, BBC World News remains behind an effective paywall in the Balkans, Baltics and Russia's neighbourhood, where there is the greatest need to counter Russian disinformation. The same is also true in sub-Saharan Africa. Will the Government consider additional funding to address this issue so that we do not leave the field wide open to Russian misinformation in particular? When it comes to national security, defending and promoting our values is as important as the defence of territory and borders.

Finally—and I know that this topic merits a whole debate on its own—while we are fighting against violent extremism and defending our country and our interests against Russia, we should not lose sight of the long-term strategic challenge that China represents. To put it into perspective—and many noble Lords will know more about this than I do—China's belt and road initiative will not only connect 80-plus countries and be funded by a pot of money that is 10 times the size of the IMF and World Bank funds combined but will involve major permanent infrastructure and the expansion of cultural ties and defence exports. China's growing power will bring with it new norms and standards, which will inevitably have an impact on the rules-based international system on which our own societies depend. When we take this into account, alongside China's growing military and cyber capabilities, the scale of the challenge becomes clear. So I hope that, before the end of this parliamentary Session, we might have an opportunity for a separate debate on the long-term UK policy towards China and the security challenges that we and our allies face.

1.23 pm

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, this debate in a sense has three dimensions: one is to discuss the transformed security environment in which we see ourselves; the second is the transformed position of the UK in the world; and the third is the appropriate response.

I note that the first report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, published last month, refers to,

“major changes to the wider security environment (including the election of the Trump Administration ... and the UK’s decision to leave the European Union); intensifying and diversifying threats to the UK’s security”.

The National Security Adviser told the committee that leaving the EU means that,

“the UK is now working in a ‘different context’ on foreign and security policy matters”.

The committee quotes Sir John Sawers, a former National Security Adviser, in an interview with *Prospect* magazine, concluding that the combined effect of an erratic and distracted Washington and withdrawing from the EU required a major reformulation of the UK’s role in the world. He said:

“One thing I don’t think we can accept is Britain adrift. A Britain without a major strategic anchor in the world”.

The report goes on to note the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, the rising asymmetric threats from Russia and the increasingly assertive nature of Chinese foreign and security policy, as well as rising cyber criminal and terrorist threats. It could have noted also the long-term threat of disorder and conflict in Africa, combined with the continuing population increase on that continent, leading to an uncontrollable flow of refugees and migrants northwards across the Mediterranean. That represents the real long-term threat of immigration, not the prospect of a limited increase in Poles and Romanians coming to Britain.

The Government’s answer to calls for a new international strategy to fit the changing international context has been to talk about a “global Britain”. The Foreign Secretary has spelled that out a little by referring to a return to east of Suez, 50 years after we left, sending an aircraft carrier group through the Malacca Strait into the South China Sea and strengthening what he calls our two major bases in Bahrain and Diego Garcia.

Last month, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the other place published a report on global Britain which said:

“The most frequent complaint we have heard from several witnesses is that the only thing that is clear about Global Britain is that it is unclear what it means, what it stands for or how its success should be measured”.

The report goes on:

“No minister during our inquiry was able to give the Committee a definitive explanation of ‘Global Britain’”.

Just last week, the committee published a further report to try to flesh out what the concept of global Britain means for the Commonwealth, since the Foreign Secretary himself has failed to do so. I note here that the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office told the committee that the Commonwealth is

not a top priority for the FCO, saying that although it is a very important organisation to the United Kingdom, it is,

“not as important, in the next period, as the neighbourhood”—by which of course he means the European continent—“China or the United States”.

There are elements of illusion in UK government policy across the board. Yesterday, we heard the Secretary of State for Transport telling us that there will be absolutely no problems in border control and so on when we leave the European Union because it was so clearly in the interest of those on the continent to maintain open borders with the UK. Liam Fox assures us that we are absolutely committed to free trade and that China and India are waiting to be helpful to us, even though both countries have spelled out their hard determination to defend their interests and strike a hard bargain. The Prime Minister herself talks about the importance of the Commonwealth, while the British Government do their best to deport long-term Commonwealth residents.

How does the concept of a global Britain apply to the Middle East, given the multiple conflicts and challenges in that region? The immediate focus for this debate is of course the Syrian conflict, but we are all aware of the potential for that conflict to spill over into the rest of the region given the number of outside actors involved. In the next four weeks, as we have heard in various briefings, we have the possibility that, on 12 May, President Trump will refuse to renew the US waiver on sanctions on Iran. We also have in May the 70th anniversary of Israeli independence, and the demonstrations in Gaza will continue and build up to that. There are elections in Lebanon—we all know how sensitive those can be—and now we have the announcement of an election in Turkey, intended to consolidate further President Erdoğan’s authoritarian regime.

What is Britain’s response to the many instabilities of the region, beyond selling as many arms as possible to the Sunni Gulf monarchies and providing logistical support to Saudi weapons systems operating over Yemen? Can the Minister tell us: what is the strategic rationale for expanding the British naval base in Bahrain? Are we, in effect, committing ourselves to the Sunni side of the Sunni-Shia divide in the region by accepting the Bahraini Government’s offer to pay for the expansion of the base? Are Her Majesty’s Government still pursuing an active dialogue with the Iranians, as we should be doing, in spite of the difficulties of dealing with that regime? Do Her Majesty’s Government intend to increase the UK’s military commitment to the Gulf further, including by stationing a carrier group there for extended periods when available, as the Foreign Secretary has suggested? If so, what will be the strategic rationale for that?

The noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, in opening this debate, spoke of British global leadership and our robust international partnerships—although leadership on our own and working in partnership with others are not entirely compatible approaches to Britain’s role in the world. The concept of global Britain, as I understand it, is about an image of Britain standing alone, in the lead and at the head of the Commonwealth,

[LORD WALLACE OF SALTAIRE]

apart from the merely European powers on the continent. We should remember that, in negotiating the joint agreement with Iran, we operated very helpfully and very successfully as part of the E3, in collaboration with the Russians, the Americans and others. Next week, I note, the E2—the leaders of France and Germany—will go to Washington to speak for Europe with the United States. Britain will be apart; we will be absent.

Geoffrey Howe, a foreign secretary of an entirely different quality from the present incumbent of that post, used to speak about the sharing of sovereignty, rather than the assertion of exceptional sovereignty. The rationale for the Syrian airstrike was, after all, the British commitment to maintaining a liberal international order, defending with others and in partnership with others the global rule of law. That is something that we on these Benches entirely and strongly support, although we are not entirely sure that such a position is consistent with the rejection of participation in our regional international order and with the particular objection that so many Conservatives appear to have to the regional rule of law, as represented by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice.

Withdrawal from the European Union's well-developed structures for co-ordinating foreign policy, defence policy and intelligence will weaken Britain's robust international partnerships. I note that the report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy says that withdrawal will unavoidably weaken co-operation and intelligence, among other matters. Of course, all the more important co-operation will be in a darker international environment than it seemed two to three years ago, when we were discussing whether we stayed or left. The Government have so far said almost nothing about how they will manage future co-operation with our European partners, although the Prime Minister, in her Mansion House speech, tantalisingly suggested that we now wished to stay within the European Defence Agency—something which Liam Fox, when Secretary of State for Defence, was determined to take Britain out of, so at least that is a minor shift forward. Can the Minister say when the Government will inform Parliament and the public of their plans to continue co-operation in one form or another? I think there are 40 working groups in the common foreign policy and security network, which we will no longer be part of. My noble friend Lord Campbell has already raised the question of what our future relationship with PESCO will be.

The Government have talked about a new security treaty for internal security co-operation, necessary when we leave, to ensure that we remain within those structures. Do the Government begin to see the need for a new treaty to ensure that in foreign policy and security we will continue to co-operate? Perhaps he would like to reinvent the western European Union—from years of old, which only a few of us can still remember—providing at least some sort of mechanism for Britain outside the European Union in discussing these matters with others. We need something here. We need the Government to tell us what they intend. Without this, our international partnerships will become a good deal less robust than the Minister was suggesting.

1.34 pm

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, I doubt that I can be either as comprehensive or indeed as controversial as the noble Lord, Lord Wallace. This debate gives us an opportunity to examine what this country's interests are in Syria, to look at the behaviour of some of our nominal allies and to examine what Her Majesty's Government can do in the present situation. Obviously, we have an interest in stopping violent terrorists, whose activities in the Middle East have found echoes both in Europe and at home. Again, we should seek to restore far greater stability in Syria, which alone will allow and make possible the return of refugees and displaced people.

ISIS may have been largely defeated as a kind of government or a form of military organisation. Al-Nusra, however, is still strong and probably well-armed. Our allies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf could cut off supplies of money and arms to al-Nusra; I just wonder whether we have taken steps to ask them to do so.

Our contribution to the recent military action can hardly be described as more than a small token. I do not think that it will greatly help stability, and I surmise that it has rallied many Syrians to Assad's side. President Trump appears to say that no more external military intervention is likely to be needed. But we should consider very seriously the effect of western military action on Arabs and Muslims throughout the world. Those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria may now believe that they are permanent targets. What, then, are their friends and neighbours elsewhere in the world to think?

Peaceful conditions in Syria are essential before refugees will dare to go home. That will require the rebuilding of many homes. It will also require pragmatic peacebuilding. This concept has been quite fully explained in a recent issue of *International Affairs* from Chatham House. It may not be widely known, either in this House or outside, that the Syrian Government actually have a minister for reconciliation. I have met him twice in successive years. He is a medical doctor of very independent mind and with an independent background—that is, not a member of the Baath Party.

Turkey has been mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Owen. I do not know how widely understood it is here that Turkey has occupied, by force, a large section of northern Syria, stretching from Jarabulus on the Euphrates to Afrin city. It has been using the services of a militia largely composed of former fighters from ISIS and al-Nusra. It is accused of settling Turks inside the occupied territory, which is a clear contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is also charged, in a report in today's press, of victimising local Yazidis, again in the occupied area.

So one has to ask, is Turkey intending to extend and widen its recognised boundaries? The President of Turkey has made serious threats against places in Syria such as Manbij, Kobane and Jazira, and I cannot help feeling that this kind of behaviour is not welcome and does not befit a NATO member. We should recall that NATO was formed, and has continued, as an alliance for self-defence and for the protection of existing frontiers.

I turn now to what may be possible to be done by our Government. I fear that they have lost a certain amount of credibility already in and around Syria, but there may nevertheless be constructive steps that are still possible. For example, we could send envoys to Kobane and Jazira where they could see for themselves the remarkable social and democratic progress that has been made there. We should co-ordinate our diplomatic activity not only with Syria's immediate neighbours but also with Iran, Russia and the United States, aiming to bring together the two possibly rival processes that have been going on in Geneva and Astana—a point mentioned by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Coventry. A second aim should be to secure the withdrawal to bases of the foreign forces already within Syria. We should also prepare for the lifting of sanctions to allow maximum reconstruction without unnecessary delays.

Lastly—and here I follow the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, who has just left the Chamber—we should recall how full diplomatic relations were restored with Iran after this country had suffered the most terrible insult. Following that precedent, we should begin with renewing low-level representation in Damascus. After all, if we can have a full embassy in North Korea, then at least we might have a *chargé d'affaires* in Syria. With such a small start, we can gradually have far better information and be able to exert greater influence.

1.45 pm

Lord Dobbs (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to talk between the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, and the noble Lord, Lord West. One is a great humanitarian and the other is—what can I say?—a great human, in all respects.

I will try to be brief. I want to talk about some truths that I regard as being self-evident so will not need too much explanation. The first of those is that, for the last 20 years, Britain's policy of intervention in the Middle East has resulted in failure and confusion. We seem to have forgotten the lessons of the last sensible and successful intervention that we carried out, which was the first Gulf War, which had clear objectives and was effectively achieved. Since then, we have had Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. I hope that this latest intervention the other day is an exception to that dismal record of missed opportunities. The Prime Minister set out a clear limited objective, which appears to have been effectively completed, and in that lies hope.

My second self-evident truth is that diplomacy is not the art of angels. In practice, it settles rather deeper down the celestial scale, if the right reverend Prelate will forgive me. Diplomacy is often a dirty business. It is not a choice of black and white or even a choice of greys. It is sometimes not a choice of doing good, but of finding the least harmful option. Sometimes, it requires us to dicker with the devil—even Assad.

Thirdly, foreign policy cannot succeed without a plan or a strategy and joined-up thinking based on real, long-term objectives—yes, Chilcot, as the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, was expounding to us earlier. Intervention cannot be based on a cry of “Something must be done”. That is not a policy or plan and it comes nowhere near a strategy. All too often, such

intervention has been based not on a clear view of our national interest but on distressing media coverage. All too often, it has made matters worse and—I really hate to say this—all too often it has the prime purpose of allowing politicians to sleep comfortably with their consciences, deaf to the sound of gunfire that they have left behind—in Iraq and Libya, for instance.

My fourth self-evident truth is that we must accept that there are some problems, no matter how distressing or harmful, that we simply cannot resolve, no matter how good our intentions or how humanitarian the cause. If we cannot resolve them, sometimes it is better not to get involved—yes, to stand back and accept that there will be an outcome that is distasteful and distressing. Sometimes, we simply cannot make things better. I do not think that we can make Syria better. At least, we have failed to so far, so perhaps we should stop trying to pick this or that ally and instead place more emphasis on humanitarian support—a policy that we do so well and so generously.

Fifthly and finally, the hard truth is that if Assad is part of the problem, he is also part of the solution. The Government's policy of absolutely refusing to talk to him or his regime is not simply pointless but positively counterproductive. That refusal undermines any ability that we have to find some sort of common ground. Our claim that we are not interested in “regime change” in Syria must ring rather hollow there given our track record. Those were precisely the words used by Mr Blair before he got us into Iraq. I listened very carefully and agreed with so much of what the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, said earlier on on this issue. If we do not intend to change the regime, we must talk to it. It is likely to be so much more productive than simply throwing bombs at it.

Like most Members of this House, I spoke out and opposed the bombing proposed in Syria in 2013. It seemed too opaque in its objectives and too much like gesture politics. This bombing in recent days is different. It has been limited, precise and appears to have been effective. It had a clear objective, which was to oppose the use of chemical weapons. There are times when we must act forcefully and bravely and accept that there are risks in these matters.

My individual views matter not a jot in these matters, but for what they are worth I support this bombing, so long as it is the start of developing a clear policy of intervention with objectives and limitations—a policy that has been so terribly lacking in the past. If noble Lords will allow me to rather murder the words of Winston Churchill, this strike is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But with courage, wisdom, patience, statesmanship and the sensible support of our partners, it might at least mark a new beginning for us in that terrible area of the Middle East.

1.50 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, I want to first thank the Government for securing this very timely debate. It is important to discuss these issues.

Terrorism remains a tier 1 threat to us. We first became aware of the Islamist terror threat in the last few years of the 1990s. We unravelled a plot to bomb London and one to poison the north London water

[LORD WEST OF SPITHEAD]
supply, but 9/11 was a wake-up call. It made us suddenly realise that the co-ordinated Islamist global threat of terrorism was real and had to be countered. So began, in a sense, our much deeper involvement in the arc of instability that runs from Bosnia right through to Kashmir.

In 2001, we invaded Afghanistan. I have to say, I think that that invasion was appropriate and correct. I was commander-in-chief. I remember being in Afghanistan with 3 Commando Brigade and a lot of Special Forces soldiers. I was amazed at the sheer scale of the terrorist training camps and, indeed, the laboratories trying to produce anthrax and such things in that benighted country. One needs to be clear that, in Afghanistan, although the Taliban worked very closely with al-Qaeda, it was not the same thing. The Taliban had no interest in carrying out terrorist attacks around the world; al-Qaeda's sole interest was in doing just that. We demolished al-Qaeda and their Taliban associates in Afghanistan very quickly and drove the remnants of al-Qaeda into the FATA in northern Pakistan. We did that inside three months. I believe very firmly that we should have gone in there, but at that stage we should have cobbled together some political grouping to run Afghanistan—let us face it, Afghanistan has always been a shambles—and we should have got out and said, “If you start training masses of terrorists to get us again, we'll come back”. However, we did not; we stayed there and became part of the problem. That has been the problem with us in all our dealings with this region: we have not thought through what to do when we won and changed regimes. Generally, we can win when we fight these people—we are far better at it—but it is what happens next that we are so bad at.

Of course, while we were still sitting in Afghanistan, we started the war in Iraq. I will not go into all the details of that, but I have to say that I was very surprised—I was the Chief of Defence Intelligence until about a year and a half beforehand—when weapons of mass destruction became the reason for the invasion. I was quite clear from my time with defence intelligence staff that there was no real threat from these weapons of mass destruction—I thought he might have had a few gas shells—so I was quite surprised to see this a year and a half later. There may have been many good reasons to go to war with Saddam: for example, every day he was trying to shoot down allied aircraft that were enforcing the no-fly zone; he was sending out emissaries across the world, trying to get hold of things; and he was treating his own people appallingly. I have to say, I do not think that WMDs were a good reason for the invasion.

Anyway, we embarked on that war with forces still in Afghanistan, so we had a war in two places. Once again, we had not thought through what would happen when we won. We were going to win—of course we could thrash a country such as Iraq—but we did not think through what we were going to do when we won. At a meeting, the Chiefs of Staff asked the Prime Minister what would happen next. The plan was called phase 4. We asked what phase 4 was. The Prime Minister, and others, assured us that the Americans had phase 4 under control. We, as the chiefs, said that we would like to see the plan; we never saw it, but— I

will not go into detail—phase 4 was not under control. We did not know what would happen. We had changed another regime with no idea of what was going to happen. The Americans dismantled their army and said that anyone who had anything to do with the Baath Party should not be there. It was a shambles. Of course, Iraq then developed in the way we all know.

So, things were going wrong in Iraq and we were having a lot of difficulty down in Basra by then. There were a lot of forces from NATO countries that did not want to be involved in Iraq. We also had 27,000 troops in Northern Ireland that were suddenly not going to be there. I remember a general saying, “If you don't use them, you lose them”. The idea of us doing more in Afghanistan then came up, so we created a second front in Afghanistan and decided to go into Helmand. We had no intelligence—as an ex-military man, I am used to lots of intelligence—in that area. Once again, it became very sticky and unpleasant. What was our long-term plan? I sat in meetings where people talked about not wanting drugs in the UK and wanting women to be educated. That was not the reason. It was extraordinary; we did not have a clear aim of what we wanted to do. I believe noble Lords are getting the thread of how I feel about what happens when we get involved in such places.

The only good thing that came out of that is that, over that period, the level of threat from terrorism in this country undoubtedly dropped. We had gone from “severe” to “substantial” by 2010. Then came the Arab spring. Why it is called that, I do not know, but if noble Lords think about what it has done to that benighted region, it is quite extraordinary. Again, I do not believe that our Government had a clear strategy for how they would handle the outcome of the Arab spring. After the removal of Gaddafi—a nasty and horrible man—Libya was a terrible mess. We were firmly involved in going there to stop the massacre of people in Benghazi, but—again—we had not thought through what we would do next. Now, the country has tribes fighting each other; it is not settled or stable. The problems in Yemen arose after the Arab spring and there was trouble in places such as Bahrain.

The real area of trouble, of course, was Syria. We saw the rise of Daesh, which I first came across in 2003. It came from Jordan after beheading a couple of people in the region and grew exponentially. It said that it wanted a caliphate, which was able to form in part of Iraq because the Sunnis had been badly treated by the Iraqi Government, in Syria and in the whole region. Again, we did not have a clear view of how we wanted to deal with Daesh. I think it right that we got involved in the alliance to start “atrritting” it, and there is no doubt that the caliphate has disappeared now, but many of the people involved have bomb-burst. The result is that we have a higher terrorist threat to this country than at any time since 9/11.

As a number of speakers have said, and I agree, our Government have made a real error with Syria. We hate and loathe Assad—let us face it, he is a loathsome man—but we have not dealt with him. In the world of politics and realpolitik, you have to deal with nasty bastards. We have not done so. As the noble Lord, Lord Dobbs, said, we have slightly indicated that we

would like a regime change. That is fine; I would love a regime change to something nice, but my goodness, many of the opposition there are worse than Daesh. If they got in, we would end up with 6 million dead Christians, Alawites and refugees. It would be pretty catastrophic. That is a real worry that we need to think through.

I have said enough on terrorism. Many noble Lords have talked about Russia. It is an enigma. Why on earth does Putin act the way he does? I do not think that the West handled the outcome of the Ukrainian revolution and the taking of Crimea very well. We did not really understand Russia. We need to understand that Kiev and Crimea fought for centuries to gain that area. We showed a lack of understanding. We do not understand that the average Russian hates NATO. They think that it is an offensive alliance. We know that it is not, but that is what they think. I love the Russian people; they are great fun and have a great sense of humour—a black sense of humour—as do we. Any Russian knows his Government. Russians would find it amusing to think that their Government were not lying. That is almost what many of them expect their Government to do. They expect their Government to lie; that is what Governments do. We have to understand and get inside their mindset. I do not think we have done that.

A number of noble Lords have asked why Putin has done all the things he has done. I am not absolutely clear, but it is extraordinary and highly dangerous. As the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, who is not in his place, said, there is no doubt that the policy of “de-escalation” that Putin started—in other words, when we start fighting they will fire a nuclear weapon because that will de-escalate the situation—is a very escalatory manoeuvre. It is very dangerous. He has spent a lot of money on nuclear and conventional weapons, yet his country has a GDP that is now about the size of Spain’s. That is not sustainable. That is a wartime economy. When there is not a war, wartime economies lead to collapse or to a war. We need to look at this and we need to be very worried.

I will not go into China. The noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Jones, rightly pointed out one belt, one road. It is very interesting that Vanuatu, right down in the South Pacific, is becoming a Chinese base. The way China is expanding and moving is extraordinary. There are real worries there. Korea has been mentioned. I will not go through that either.

Again and again in this House, noble Lord and noble Baroness after noble Lord and noble Baroness have said that we have to spend more money on defence if we are taking this seriously. It seems as though one is talking in a vacuum. I could list almost every single debate in which I have spoken where this has been said, with support from around the House. It does not seem as though anything is happening. A lot of platitudes are mouthed about defence and security being the most important thing to any Government, but one is not seeing it happening. I find that extremely worrying.

The House would be very upset if I did not say that we need more ships, so I will say that we need more ships. However, we really do have to do something

about defence spending. This has gone on too long. We are at a cliff edge and that is very dangerous for our nation.

2.01 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, the *National Security Capability Review* starts by saying:

“The world has become more uncertain and volatile since 2015”. It goes on to talk about the new fusion doctrine. It says categorically:

“We will further strengthen and modernise Defence and the Armed Forces”.

All the right intentions are laid out right up front in dealing with strengthening our overseas network, expanding the communications team and enhancing cross-government funds. But what is the reality? It is the backdrop of Syria, where the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has estimated that 13.1 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and that, as a result of the crisis, 5.6 million of them are in acute need. It also estimates that 6.1 million people have been internally displaced by the violence. This is a shocking scenario. In addition to the 13.1 million people estimated to be in need in Syria, the UN has recorded that 5.6 million refugees have fled the country due to the civil war.

When we had the awful chemical attacks and the world got to know about it, what really upset me was that President Trump called President Macron first. That is Britain’s loss of standing. It is for one reason only: Brexit. We have lost our standing in the world even before leaving the European Union. The USA and the UK have had the closest special relationship. How on earth did this happen? It would never have happened historically. I take it as an insult to our standing in the world that that happened.

The decision to deploy the Armed Forces using the prerogative power was absolutely right in this instance. If we had waited for a UN resolution we would not have got it because Russia would have vetoed it. In fact, I remember in the summer of 2003 my late father General Bilimoria’s last visit to Britain straight after the Iraq war and invasion. He was asked by a journalist, “General, should the West have invaded Iraq?” He replied, “Absolutely not without a United Nations resolution”. He was absolutely right then, but I do not think that Theresa May could have waited for a United Nations resolution and if she had she would not have got it.

Since 2015, looking at the SDSR 2015, defence policy has been defined by the words “global reach”. But then there is this funding gap of supposedly £20 billion. Could the noble Earl confirm that there is this gap? Could he also reassure us, following all the rumours for months that HMS “Bulwark”, HMS “Albion” and 28 Wildcat helicopters are going to be chopped, and that we are going to lose 1,000 soldiers from the Royal Marines, that that is not going to happen, against the backdrop of the threats we face?

The other aspects of the warfare we face are, yes, the jihadi terrorism of the Islamic State, but also the hybrid warfare that is being practised by President Putin. Instead of the piecemeal cuts that have been going on, we need to increase our spending—as we have heard on all sides of the House—from 2% to not

[LORD BILIMORIA]

just 2.5% but to 3%, as the noble Lord, Lord Owen, and others said. Will the noble Earl confirm that that is what we should be doing? Our national security strategy is failing to keep pace with emerging threats. We need more direction. In fact, government committees and parliamentary committees are saying that. The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy said that an “honest conversation” on increasing defence spending was needed if the Government were to match their stated ambitions. Does the Minister agree?

The vote for Brexit has pushed the UK into a different context. A lot of the talk now is about how we will continue maintaining defence and security links with the EU. Let us be honest: the peace that has existed in Europe over the last seven decades has been not just because of NATO but because of the existence of the European Union as well. The fact that it exists has created the peace, but the mechanisms that exist within the European Union have also helped the peace. Could the Minister tell us what we are going to do to try to maintain all those important links?

The report from the committee talked not only about the rise of ISIS but about the refugee crisis; the tensions in North Korea, Iran and the South China Sea; increasing Russian aggression, and the impact of technology and cyberattacks. There is also radicalisation, which continues to be a huge threat. The defence committee has very clearly said that 3% should be the figure.

We are finally getting two aircraft carriers. It is shocking, in the world we have had since the awful SDSR 2010, when Liam Fox, our great Trade Secretary, was the Defence Secretary—it was the worst SDSR in living memory in this country, wrecking our Armed Forces—that our total Armed Forces now are 155,000. On top of that, they are all currently short-staffed. There is a deficit of 5.6%, or more than 8,000 personnel. Will the Minister confirm that there is this deficit? If we add the reserves and the Gurkhas we have a total service personnel of 195,000. The SDSR 2015 said that we were going to increase Army numbers to 95,000. We are now going backwards. Could the Minister explain what is going on here? While the threat is increasing, we are reducing the numbers of staff. I appreciate that important things such as the nuclear deterrent are being maintained, but is everything else being maintained to the extent required?

The Royal Navy and the RAF are 10% short of their recruitment targets. The Army’s shortfall at times has been 30%. This is another thing that upset me about the attacks. The fact we had to attack was bad enough in itself, but there is more and more an accusation that we have out-of-date equipment. The Tornados have been around since 1979. The British forces, in this joint attack with France and America, were, quite frankly, playing a supporting role when we should have been right there at the front. Our Royal Navy destroyer, HMS “Duncan”, was moved away while the French ship fired on the Syrian targets. Where was Britain’s £1 billion vessel? It has space on its deck for a cruise missile launcher, but that was axed, supposedly to save cash. Could the Minister confirm that that happened? It was the Rafale jets, along with the Americans and supported by Mirage 2000s, that were at the

forefront. People have said that it was an America and France show where we played second fiddle. I take that as an insult, because we have some of the finest Armed Forces in the world. We should never play second fiddle. We should be right there in front leading the way.

Meg Hillier, the Labour chairwoman of the Public Accounts Committee, has said that tensions have never been so bad with Russia and that it was critical that the Armed Forces were fully staffed. However, the National Audit Office report shows that the Armed Forces are woefully below complement. The Ministry of Defence needs to take a long, hard look at its current approach. Without more innovative methods to retain staff, there are going to be big gaps in capability and the overstretching of already hard-working Armed Forces.

As I mentioned earlier, we know that recruitment is almost facing a crisis, and on top of recruitment is morale. The latest survey shows that 58% of service personnel are either neutral or unsatisfied with service life in general. Again, morale is the most important thing, along with esprit de corps, in the Armed Forces. On a positive side, I am delighted, with CHOGM taking place and Prime Minister Modi here, that the UK and India want to continue to strengthen their ties in respect of their armed services, their defence and security relationships and their joint exercises; with officers from both armed services at the RCDS, the National Defence College and staff colleges in both countries and the conducting of joint exercises throughout. This is absolutely good news and it should be encouraged even more.

The lack of engineers is another area of concern. There is a shortfall of 2,400 engineers and a shortfall of intelligence analysts. The RAF, which we are all so proud of, is celebrating its centenary. It is a phenomenal institution that is an example to the whole world, yet there is a shortfall of 800 pilots.

It is not only the Armed Forces that are vital to national security: it is the police as well. Theresa May, when she was Home Secretary, stood up to the police and everyone said how brave she was, but she was standing up to the wrong people. We should have been increasing our police forces, but we have cut them by over 20,000. We have cut neighbourhood policing and our armed police officers. Now it is so reassuring to see two armed officers at every entrance to Parliament. If there had been two armed officers at every entrance, our police officer would not have lost his life. We have not taken our security and our armed police officers seriously enough: we need to bolster our police forces far more and appreciate them far more. Neighbourhood policing through the internet is all very well, but there is nothing that makes up for police officers on the ground: the British bobby, respected around the world, is what is required, not cuts to the police forces.

In conclusion, we have cuts in our Armed Forces when threats are increasing and cuts in police officers when threats are increasing, yet national security is meant to be the number one priority of a Government. We need to increase spending and prioritise the Armed Forces for 3% GDP straightaway and bring our police forces back up to strength to where they were before

all the cuts; then we will be able to face all of these awful threats—this hybrid warfare—whether they are from Russia, China, jihadi terrorism or anywhere else.

2.13 pm

Lord Marlesford (Con): My Lords, I thank the Library for its most excellent brief for this debate. It is well worth keeping, and I shall add to it the speech by the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, which I found absolutely fascinating historically.

I support, for its clinical efficiency, Saturday's punitive strike on Syria's chemical weapons capability. However, the motive that Assad could have had to carry out the Douma attack eludes me. Why, when he was so clearly winning, would he have risked invoking the wrath and retribution of the West? On the other hand, to do so was clearly to the advantage of the Islamist fighters. I hope that the international investigators do find evidence that there was a chlorine attack and that it could have come only from Assad.

I watched, as many others would have done, the extensive briefing on Saturday afternoon from the Pentagon. It revealed a fundamental contradiction in Western strategy. There were two conflicting statements of aim: the first was the elimination of ISIS in Syria as a priority and the second was not to interfere in the Syrian civil war. These two aims were echoed in the Prime Minister's Statement to Parliament on 16 April. I was amazed to hear my noble friend the Leader of the House say on Monday:

"Our position remains that we do not believe there can be a sustainable peace in Syria with Assad in power".

As the noble Lord, Lord Kerr—who knows a thing or two about diplomacy, as well as about political operations—said,

"we have parroted that slogan for too long".—[*Official Report*, 16/4/18; col. 1030.]

I will not blame my noble friend the Leader of the House personally—I am sure that she was quoting from some out-of-date FCO brief and at least my noble friend Lord Ahmad did not repeat that today—but I hope she will allow me to explain why she was wrong. The fact is that from shortly after the uprisings started in Syria in March 2011, the civil war in Syria has been a struggle of the secular Assad Government against political Islam. Political Islam is the process of translating, by jihad—or struggle—the fundamentalist Sunni Islamic beliefs of Wahhabism, which originated in the 18th century, into theocratic government in Muslim countries, and eventually throughout the world. This is religious government based on Sharia law. It is by definition the antithesis of democracy as it perpetuates power by denying the right of the people to elect their own Government and to change the law.

There are many manifestations of political Islam. They all stem from the Salafist movement, which sought to implement Wahhabism. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, was originally just a terrorist organisation. Subsequently, it has become a political front for political Islam in the West, rather as Sinn Féin did for the IRA. Of course, it was used by the CIA initially, at the time of Nasser, to fight communism in the Middle East and later to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. The best-known jihadist groups

of Sufi Islam include: Hamas, founded in 1987; al-Qaeda, founded in 1988, Taliban, founded in 1994, Boko Haram, founded in 2002, al-Shabaab, founded in 2006 and al-Nusra, founded in 2012. Then, in 2014, ISIS claimed world leadership when it was formed in Syria from al-Qaeda.

Sir John Jenkins, the former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, has argued that any attempt to place Islamists,

"on some scale of relative extremism or moderation",

is "almost worthless". He said that in a lecture in America in November, and he was the person who was set the job of studying the Muslim Brotherhood by David Cameron. The aspiration of ISIS is for world domination, and this rejects the concept, the legitimacy and even the continued existence of the nation state on which international law and international relations, and thus our concept of civilisation, are based.

The Russians got directly involved in Syria in September 2015, when they bombed anti-Assad rebels who were, so mistakenly, backed by the West. At that time Assad was under considerable pressure. By constantly repeating the refrain, "There is no future for Assad in Syria", the West was always risking the arrival of somebody else to help him, and it was Russia which did so. But we have to face the fact that without the Russian intervention, Syria might now be under Islamist rule. Assad is now well on the way to regaining control of his whole country, and the sooner we recognise this and start talking to him, as other noble Lords have said, the sooner we can hope to influence that part of the Middle East. Iran, Syria's other great supporter, has its own, ultimately theocratic, Shia government with Hezbollah, founded as a Shiite political movement in 1982, after Israel invaded Lebanon to root out the PLO. Now it is a powerful and very big military force defending Shias against Sunni hegemony in that part of the world. In the Middle East, it is astride both Iran and Lebanon.

There is a fundamental choice in many Muslim countries between theocracy and secular government, and secular government will more than likely be authoritarian. Authoritarianism is not something we like, but given a choice between authoritarianism and theocracy, I believe that authoritarianism is preferable from a world point of view. That is a fact we have to accept. We have to face what both the Russians and the Chinese fully realise: that while most Muslims are not Islamists, all Islamists present themselves as Muslims, and this gives them a great advantage in winning the hearts and minds of Muslim populations. Western foreign policy has been woeful. It has enabled both Russia, economically bust as it is, and China, under its very strong new leader, to get into the driving seat, thus reducing what I regard as the benign influence of western liberal democracy.

The *National Security Capability Review* states:

"The border is a vital asset for our national security".

The security of our national borders is shared between the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office. In the Ministry of Defence I have considerable confidence, but I believe—and I think that the noble Lord, Lord West, would agree—that we need more small ships to protect the border, because I foresee, perhaps as early

[LORD MARLESFORD]

as this summer, large numbers of people trying to migrate by sea, as they have in other parts of the world, into Britain. Something has to be done about that and I do not know what plans the Government have.

As for the Home Office, it is now 12 years since the then Home Secretary, now the noble Lord, Lord Reid of Cardowan, famously declared on 23 May 2006 that the Home Office was “not fit for purpose”. It is sad and deeply worrying that this is clearly still the case; and I am not talking just about the deplorable matter of the “Empire Windrush”. Many things need to be done for the protection of our borders. My final recommendation is that the Home Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons start to look into that in detail—if I can give them any help, I will be delighted to do so.

2.23 pm

Lord Ricketts (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as set out in the register. I have discovered that there are a lot of informal clubs and groups around your Lordships’ House; one of the smallest is that of former National Security Advisers, since it has only one member. I hope noble Lords will not feel that that disqualifies me from contributing to the debate. I welcome the fact that the debate looks at national security as a whole. One of the intentions behind setting up the National Security Council, as I did for David Cameron in 2010, was that it should co-ordinate across the whole of government all the different arms—security, defence and foreign policy—and assemble around the Prime Minister and senior Ministers all the key advisers, including, for the first time in a structured way, the intelligence community heads, to have systematic discussion across this whole range with plenty of challenge, and a forum to really take decisions. That is just as well since, as many noble Lords have said, we have more simultaneous threats to the security of this country now than at any time since the Cold War.

If we look at the immediate situation, as others have said, the Islamist terrorist threat is clearly high. It is not an existential threat to this country but it needs continued vigilance. The international security system put in place by our predecessors in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War is under real stress, particularly from countries that do not accept the rules that were laid down there. One of the most interesting recent comments on national security was from US Defense Secretary Mattis in presenting the US defence strategy a couple of months ago. He said that,

“great power competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of US national security”.

That is a phrase that we too should ponder in this House.

Russia has been at the heart of this debate, quite rightly. I can say from my own experience that we have taken a tougher approach to Russia in the UK since the Litvinenko poisoning than any other European country. We understood from that time that the Russia of President Putin regards the West as an adversary; that he is playing a zero-sum game; that he will push wherever he senses weakness; that he is creating a

sphere of influence, in the classic sense, around Russia; and that he is actively trying to sow discord and division among his adversaries. Russia is deliberately developing tools to blur the lines between war and covert manipulation. The record on that is pretty clear, from the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea, the interference in Donbass, the pressure on the Baltic states, the increasingly blatant manipulation of our media and our electoral processes in the West, the intervention in Syria in support of President Assad—all of that points in the same direction.

And then there was the poisoning of the Skripals. Whoever in Moscow authorised that—I agree that there is no plausible alternative to it being authorised and conducted from Moscow—miscalculated very badly. I assume they thought it would be like the Litvinenko case: a few Russian spies would be thrown out, the world would move on and a chilling message would have been sent to Russian traitors around the world. I think they miscalculated the growing sense of unease that the previous recklessness of Russian behaviour has generated in many countries. People saw it as another confirmation of a pattern of behaviour and therefore there has been a very strong and supportive international reaction. I applaud the way the Government have handled that very difficult case with determination, firmness and effective rallying of a large international consensus—much larger, in my view, than the Russians expected. They have been wrong-footed, and they have reacted with a classic combination of sarcasm and dismissal, coupled with menace and obfuscation. We now need to go through what has been announced in terms of implementing financial measures to show that this was not simply a one-off expulsions effort, but that there are real consequences for Russian money in London and other capitals.

At a most inconvenient moment for Russia, their Syrian allies chose to use chemical weapons in Douma. I agree with other noble Lords who have said that it is incomprehensible why Assad should have felt it was necessary to use chemical weapons against his own citizens at that very moment. Again, I entirely applaud the Government’s handling of that. It was absolutely right that Britain joined the US and France in the military response. It was an error in 2013 that the other place voted against joining air strikes. They too were limited with a specific target, and fitted well into the strategy. That sent a signal of British disengagement around the world. What signal would it have sent if Britain had stood aside a second time from western action? Of course, that one-off military operation will not fundamentally change the Syrian civil war. I agree with others in the debate that it needs to form part of a wider strategy and that we need to get back to a political process. I am sure that the Minister can put the Government’s position more clearly than I can, but in my memory it has long been the position of the Government that the Syrian regime would have to be part of any such negotiation. The problem has been getting the Syrian parties together; that needs to be re-energised now.

The Russian reaction to the Syrian use of CW has been very odd. It is as if they thought we were blaming Russia for using CW and that we would attack Russian

forces. They had some problem keeping a single coherent line; on the same day that the Russian defence ministry in Moscow was saying, “It was the British wot did it”, the Russian representative in New York was saying that there had not been any chemical attack at all. We had a great deal of scaremongering that any western military action could be the prelude to World War III, and that things were now worse than the Cold War. Worse than the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia? I do not think so, although some of our media picked up the Russian propaganda and worried people a great deal.

It is essential for a Prime Minister to have discretion to authorise military action in an emergency, and to be accountable to Parliament afterwards for the exercise of that discretion. I am clear that any British Government with any sense of survival will take care to consult Parliament and have parliamentary backing before launching any significant large-scale military activity putting British lives at risk—certainly any ground-force military operation—but a limited, contained military strike of the kind that we saw at the weekend, co-ordinated with allies and therefore with decisions required urgently, seems within the discretion that a Prime Minister should have. It should be an issue for political discretion and accountability, not for definition in legislation.

In addition to the immediate and the urgent there are some very long-term issues, as other noble Lords have indicated. Since before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the twin pillars of our grand strategy have been to be the closest of allies with Washington, and to be anchored in Europe despite a degree of turbulence there. Bits of masonry are falling off each pillar. Leaving the European Union clearly changes one element of that strategy, and the inevitable US move in the focus of its national security towards Asia alters the relationship with Washington. That is no surprise, as the defining national security issue of the next 50 years will be US competition with China; the surprise has been President Trump’s retreat from multilateralism and the hesitations about endorsing NATO Article 5, which produced the other interesting comment of the last year, which was Chancellor Merkel at the G7 saying, “We Europeans truly have to take our fate in our own hands”. For a Federal German Chancellor to show that degree of concern about NATO is worrying.

I profoundly hope that a review of Britain’s role in the world will conclude that we should remain an activist, engaged international power, living up to our responsibilities as a permanent member. However, that argument has to be remade and re-won with the British people after all the problems that we have had with Iraq and Afghanistan, as others have said. That argument needs to begin now. It is one of the most important tasks for our National Security Council, alongside all the immediate and urgent matters that it has to deal with.

Lord West of Spithead: In the context of the noble Lord’s work as National Security Adviser, what level of discussion was there about the scale of defence forces required for our nation?

Lord Ricketts: I had the privilege of being the National Security Adviser at the time of what the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, referred to as the worst security and defence review of all time, in 2010. It ran alongside a comprehensive spending review. It is an inevitable law of government that strategic decisions have to be taken in light of the resources available, otherwise you make a strategy and totally fail to fund it, which does not help you either. I would defend that 2010 review. As noble Lords will remember, it inherited a large gap in the programme for the Ministry of Defence, and tried to bring the programme and the defence budget back together. One of the legacies of that most awful defence review ever will be our two aircraft carriers and the F35s on them, which will restore a degree of clout to British defence policy.

2.36 pm

Baroness Finn (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, after such an excellent, measured and learned speech. Two issues are circling in this debate and are best considered individually. The first concerns Parliament’s role in military action, in this case in Syria, and our use of military force as a response to the use of prohibited chemical weapons. The second concerns the merits of that action in particular. Obfuscation of the first cannot be allowed to act as a convenient smokescreen to avoid the second.

On the first—the role of Parliament in military action—let us be clear: nobody is saying that Members of either House should not hold the Government to account in decisions that put our Armed Forces in harm’s way. Nobody is saying that we should not have a debate, and nobody is suppressing those who hold dissenting views and oppose military action. The only question of significance is whether the Government need prior approval for military action from Parliament, via a vote. The royal prerogative allows that it does not, and there is good reason for that constitutional doctrine. In matters of war, the Executive and the legislature are separate. There are no grey areas to be exploited; there is no handy definition available of what constitutes urgent and non-urgent action. It is a judgment left to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to act or not, and to account for their actions to Parliament.

The Government necessarily have access to intelligence which Parliament might not have seen and that cannot be made public. It may well be on such evidence that such military decisions must be taken. The Government have therefore acted entirely properly. Parliament’s role is to debate and scrutinise decisions already made. Have we really learned nothing from 2013, when the House of Commons in effect shamefully vetoed the Prime Minister’s call to take military action in Syria? The result of that vote was that President Obama—and therefore the rest of the West—was deterred from intervening, creating a vacuum into which Putin moved as he purported to take responsibility for decommissioning those chemical weapons. That was the last moment when there was a chance that the non-extremist opposition could have defeated Assad. Russia’s intervention on Assad’s side to pummel the opposition forces arguably created the space which Daesh or ISIS swiftly occupied.

[BARONESS FINN]

On the action, it is important that we ask only the right and relevant questions. Military action should never be the first choice and should be deployed only when necessary. However, it is not relevant, as the leader of the Opposition did on Sunday, to ask whether we should use our “abilities” to save lives, as if this were an either/or scenario and we had callously chosen war over peace. It is not relevant to question only the legality of the action. Of course there will be those who contest the legality, but the legal case of a military response to the use of prohibited chemical weapons is based on alleviating “overwhelming humanitarian suffering” and is well-founded. We might well prefer a UN Security Council resolution to back that up, but we know that this is not available, as Russia, Assad’s partner in tyranny, would veto it.

The responsibility to protect has become part of the West’s legal framework. It underpinned our successful and just intervention in Kosovo to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. In Syria, the US, the UK and France intervened together in a proportionate way to underscore the important point that the international norm prohibiting the use of chemical weapons must not be violated. Do not tell me that the signatories of the UN charter in the dark days of the 1940s would seriously have stood aside, as a dictator used abhorrent weapons against his own people.

It is not relevant to avoid making this difficult decision by claiming that a diplomatic solution is still on the table and is being wilfully ignored, when all but the most naive know that it is not. The leader of the Opposition says that he would like these weapons destroyed, as they were in 2013 and 2015. Does it not strike him as odd that, after each of these events, there are further instances of not only the retention of prohibited chemical weapons by Assad’s forces but their despicable and unconscionable deployment? The end of a genuine diplomatic solution would see Assad stand trial in The Hague for war crimes, but does anyone think that is on the table?

The use of chemical weapons against civilians in Douma which killed more than 40, many of them children, is an atrocity that should stand alone and not go unpunished. The UN has concluded that chemical weapons were used two weeks ago, and now Putin is preposterously claiming that the evidence is being faked. Children are gasping their last breaths so that he can scorch the earth across the Middle East to bolster his own political position. Hiding behind legal nit-picking, wishful thinking and process is not behaviour becoming the leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition, apparently because, in his view, anyone who opposes the West is deserving of support. It is no surprise that the contentions he advances can also be heard in Tehran and Moscow, not in free parliamentary debate but on state-controlled television. Yet Iranian and Russian motivations are as suspect as their means are wicked. Syria could potentially have been freed from Assad’s brutal regime five or six years ago, if Iran had not been propping him up.

I end by asking the question that matters: will this action deter the future use of chemical weapons? It was not done on the assumption that it will end the war, topple Assad and bring about regime change; it

was meant as a direct response to a chemical weapons attack to deter any repeated uses. Will it work? We obviously cannot know for sure, but Assad and his Russian puppet masters must now grasp a new precedent: that every time they choose to deploy chemical weapons, they will suffer direct and significant military set-backs. While we cannot know for sure whether this will work, we can calculate that it is surely worth the risk.

We need to send a signal to the world that norms cannot be crossed with impunity. After Rwanda, we said we would intervene in genocide; after nuclear proliferation to North Korea, the world asked how this could be allowed to happen without someone stopping it. We were right to take action in Kosovo without the backing of the Security Council. In this instance, the Government were right to take action in conjunction with the US and France. If such action reduces the prospect of these despicable weapons being unleashed again on the innocent by even a fraction, then surely it is our duty to take it.

2.42 pm

Lord Lee of Trafford (LD): My Lords, I want to focus my remarks this afternoon on the Syrian missile strike, which is but a small piece of the tragic and complex jigsaw that is Syria today, with civil war, ISIS, tribal conflict, major power intervention, brutality, bloodshed and destruction on a horrific scale. One thing is clear: Assad and his henchmen, sadly, with Russian and Iranian support have virtually won the conflict and are likely to remain in power. The time has surely come for our Government to change their message and drop the mantra that Assad cannot be part of Syria’s future, as so many other noble Lords have said this afternoon. He clearly will be, and it is absurd to pretend otherwise.

The military action that was taken, which I strongly support, substantially degraded Assad’s chemical warfare capability. It reinstated a red line—nothing more than that. I firmly believe that the participation of France and ourselves played a key role in supporting the Mattis Pentagon approach of a limited, focused strike, compared with the wider military action indicated and perhaps favoured by the Trump-Bolton axis in America.

There has been considerable debate about parliamentary authorisation for military action, but the call for prior approval, in my judgment, falls at virtually every hurdle of examination. Could our allies have been expected to wait? No. Could we disclose the precise nature of targets? No. Could we disclose the intelligence on which our decisions were based, which probably came from France, with its historical connections with Syria and deep involvement there, and from the United States and probably Israel and Saudi Arabia? No. Could we say that there would be only one strike? No, because if the first had not been completely successful, we would probably have needed a second strike. So what would have been left for the Government to say? It would have been just, “We intend to attack Syria, probably with the United States and France. Please give us a blank cheque to do so”. Recalling Parliament would likely have further extended the time gap between the terrible initial chemical assault and our military action.

What has also become clear, and I will make a semi-political point here, is that Jeremy Corbyn is a near pacifist and that he and colleagues such as Diane Abbott can hardly bring themselves to criticise Russia. This is despite its involvement in the downing of civilian aircraft, its aggression in Crimea and Ukraine, its military and logistical support for Assad, its repeated blocking of United Nations resolutions—I think we were told there were 12 in all by the Front Bench earlier—its poisoning in Salisbury, its delay and prevarication in letting the international inspection teams into the Douma site and, of course, its cyber activity. I have to say that Jeremy Corbyn is totally unfit for prime ministerial office.

One of the few positives emanating from this situation has been the successful use of the hotline, thankfully keeping allied military action well away from Russian forces and their capability, and avoiding the slide into a potential third world war scenario. We praise the professionalism of our Armed Forces in what was almost a textbook operation. It is quite clear from the briefings we have had that meticulous care was taken to avoid civilian and collateral damage in the selection and choice of targets.

There have been repeated concerns in this House, in previous debates and today, about the size of our Armed Forces—their hollowing out, to use the words of the noble Baroness from the Opposition Front Bench. We have far too few naval vessels. I thought that we were going to hear a speech from the noble Lord, Lord West, that would not actually mention naval vessels, but then he brought them in at the tail-end. There has also been a near unanimous call for an increase in defence expenditure. At the very least, I suggest, the naval vessels that we have should have both defensive and offensive capabilities, where possible. The Type 45 destroyer which was in the Mediterranean at the time leading a NATO force—I believe it was HMS “Duncan”—was originally designed, as were other Daring-class destroyers, to carry cruise and Tomahawk missiles. This was not proceeded with on cost grounds. When the noble Earl, Lord Howe, replies to this debate, can he indicate whether cruise missiles could still be fitted to our Daring-class destroyers and what the cost would be? If we had that military capability, there would clearly be another option for our forces.

The short and medium-term future for the Middle East and Syria looks bleak. This is deeply worrying. At the start of the year, intelligence sources were predicting a serious Hezbollah-Iranian/Israeli conflict this year. Estimates of the number of missiles supplied by Iran directly and indirectly to Hezbollah range from 30,000 to 100,000. I have to say that I fear the worst. With President Trump quite clearly emboldened by the recent military success—“Mission Accomplished!”—his very strong and close support for Israel and his antipathy towards Iran, where could all this lead? In the longer term, there has to be some form of negotiated political solution in Syria and the wider Middle East, but it could be a very long time coming, with terrible humanitarian suffering in the meantime.

2.50 pm

Lord Birt (CB): My Lords, it is a real pleasure to participate in this most expert and well-informed debate.

Our world presents innumerable threats. In parts of the globe, we face a powder keg of demagoguery, extreme ideology and regional rivalry, and added to this venomous mix are religious factionalism, ethnic confrontation and terrorism. Old and new technologies fan these flames: nuclear proliferates; Salisbury and Syria bear witness to a century-old ban on chemical weapons not holding; cyber enables malign, encrypted communication; there are powerful propaganda tools for evil; and there is intrusive and destructive new weaponry. There is no escape from this toxic brew. ISIS fighters return home to our streets, and conflict in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America promotes population shifts which in turn impact the equilibrium of settled nations far away, in turn promoting extremism, isolationism and protectionism. We are all connected.

We, our allies and international bodies all struggle to deal with this compound of forces. Russia’s use of its veto to defend the indefensible cruelly underlines the limitations of the UN. NATO countries represent overwhelming wealth, dwarfing other blocs, yet they appear collectively not to be able to invest effectively in comprehensive, integrated military capability, and NATO is further handicapped by its defined purpose from projecting western power beyond the theatre of its operations. Moreover, the internationalist consensus of our natural allies is undermined by emerging populism, making concerted action harder still.

How is the UK to navigate this messy, troubled world? There is no magic wand. History bequeaths the UK a world role which we have never forsaken. Moreover, we have high military and intelligence capability and, with others, we should be willing prudently and carefully to deploy it where clear global benefit can be obtained. We have learned the limitations of intervention in civil wars—I have never heard those limitations better expressed than they were expressed today by the noble Lord, Lord West—but we were entirely right this week, alongside our key allies, to draw a red line in Syria and to do so with dispatch.

I am uncomfortable with the stories of stretched and inadequate capabilities in our Armed Forces—best evidenced today by the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria—even with an investment of 2% of GDP, and I have instinctive sympathy with the cause, but I would like to hear a refined case made by the Armed Forces and their supporters which clearly differentiates between what capabilities we as a sovereign nation must have and what capabilities we need to participate in a concerted effort with our key allies. Is there not a case for intensifying the co-ordination of our joint defence capability with our closest allies, France and the US?

In international aid, the UK has a fine, progressive record. In driving global prosperity, we have long been proselytisers for free trade and for its beneficial impact, and we will remain so. We are keen supporters of international law and its institutions, and we must redouble our efforts to improve the effectiveness of these institutions, especially the UN. We must use our considerable diplomatic skill, our standing and our soft power to promote peace, stability and prosperity worldwide and to address other pressing global challenges, from malaria to climate change to plastic in our oceans.

[LORD BIRT]

Finally, on our own continent, we need above all to bring Russia in from the cold. It is one of the great civilisations. It brought us Eisenstein, Diaghilev, Tolstoy and Stravinsky. We have strong cultural bonds with that great country, but Russia's political culture has been shaped by feudalism, communism and autocracy. In its own true interest, Russia's future must lie not with adventuring, mischief and opportunism, let alone an extraordinary, incomprehensible use of an advanced military weapon in an English cathedral city. We were lucky to hear the erudite reflections of the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, on the context behind that dreadful act. Rather, Russia's political and economic future must surely lie with a mature and grown-up relationship with its European neighbours, and we must do all we can to foster that and to restore harmony on our doorstep. Here, I echo the sentiments of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, and of the Minister in his opening remarks.

We must, of course, secure our own home territory, but the better safeguard of our security will come from fighting ever harder, in line with our natural instincts as a nation, to foster internationalism wherever we can and to help to make a better world.

2.57 pm

Baroness Pidding (Con): My Lords, I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution in this important and timely debate. I acknowledge the brave men and women in our Armed Forces and police and the work they do in keeping us safe. The topic of this debate is wide-ranging, and I shall limit my speech to supporting the Prime Minister's actions in the context of the national security situation in recent weeks.

The dictionary definition of terrorism is,

“the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in pursuit of political aims”.

What then was the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal if not terrorism? Russia has shown total disregard of and contempt for international law and human decency. It has for far too long violated the sovereignty and dignity of its neighbours, Georgia and Ukraine. I am encouraged by our Prime Minister's leadership of international diplomatic efforts against Putin's regime. We cannot allow Russia and other rogue states to think that they can bulldoze international law and order and target individuals in our country. I hope that because of the Prime Minister's actions it will think very hard before attempting anything like that again. Russia must learn that it is unacceptable to attempt to murder people on the streets of our country or to assist with the murder of those in Syria.

Over the past month we have seen first-hand the horror of chemical warfare on our streets, but this pales in comparison to what is happening in Syria. Not only is the use of chemical weapons prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria has acceded, but it offends and violates our very deeply held beliefs. For this reason it is often referred to as a red line, but what is the purpose of a red line if it is not enforced? What are we achieving by making such profound declarations if we are not prepared to act to enforce them? We did that in 2013 and the cost

of non-intervention has been punitively high: the refugee crisis, the destruction of Aleppo and the empowerment of Russia.

Many commentators and a number of noble Lords have spoken about the cost of intervention in Iraq. It is true that we should act with caution and learn the lessons of that war, but this is fundamentally different from Iraq: this is not about regime change. It is about telling President Assad that he cannot use chemical weapons to kill and terrorise his people into submission.

We should not forget how many lives in Bosnia, Rwanda and indeed Syria have been lost because of our unwillingness to intervene, and how many lives in Kosovo and Sierra Leone were saved because of British military intervention. I believe that by not intervening in 2013 we committed a sin of omission that has led to the deaths of thousands of people. Crucially, we also sent Assad a message that he could use one of the vilest forms of warfare to murder his own people without any threat of retaliation. Assad has gone on to use chemical weapons dozens of times. The Prime Minister has done exactly the right thing by telling the regime that it can no longer act with impunity.

3.01 pm

Lord Glasman (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Ministers for brokering this debate. It is always an honour to participate in a debate in this House. I say particularly to the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, that I think last week's attacks were Chilcot-compliant, and that is a very important thing to bear in mind.

I mentioned on Monday that I had been to Syria. I came back 10 days ago. I was in the north-eastern part of Syria for five days as a guest of what they call the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, and in order to get there I had to go via Baghdad. I want to share some of my reflections and observations with the House because I think they are pertinent. On arrival in Baghdad, it is impossible to escape the fact that the Shia have won; the city is festooned with tower-high luminous green posters of Ali and Hussein and in miniature form they are on every soldier's heart, including sayings about people being prepared to die for Hussein and Ali. I was driven by a driver through a very congested area at 140 kilometres an hour so it was not a really calm reflection, but there are now high concrete barricades keeping the Sunni Arab community in their areas. Baghdad is now 65% Sunni. I met Ministers and MPs from the ruling al-Dawa party, and they left me under no illusion that, having had more than 1,000 years of living under the Sunni Arab yoke, as they put it, this was now their time and they were not going to relinquish that easily.

I will share with the House a golden political rule that I was taught. In order to get to the world as it should be—and I think we can all agree what that is: reconciliation between divided communities, democracy and the rule of law—you have to begin with a sober analysis of the world as it is. So, however difficult it is to digest, in the world as it is in relation to Iraq, the Shia have won nationally, Iran has won regionally and Russia has won globally. We have to begin our analysis from that realistic point. When I was preparing this speech, I went through the *Hansard* of the debates on

the Iraq war in 2002-03 but I could not find any analysis that presented that outcome, so I suggest that we proceed with some humility in this reflection.

A kind of mirage or delusion governed our foreign policy: that there would be some form of moderate Sunni Arab force that we could ally with, but that did not exist in Iraq and it certainly does not in Syria. According to what I saw in Syria, we seem to be in alliance with the Free Syrian Army, whose troops are overwhelmingly constituted by al-Qaeda, al-Nusra and defeated ISIS forces. Russia and Assad—again, we are talking about the presence of Russia—have fought against ISIS, and it seems that they are ultimately going to win that conflict.

Any national security strategy requires an analysis of the primary enemy. It is important to look at the latest research on how ISIS—Daesh, as it is known over there—ruled. It was based on the systematic rape and subjugation of women. I spoke to women in Syria and Iraq who were sold in cages in public markets. That was the mode of life. Equally important, the property of the Shia, Christians, Yazidis and Kurds was immediately confiscated and then sold legally, through a ministry, to the Sunni Arabs—this in a land where those people had been living together for more than a millennium.

The tragedy for us is that a third force did and does exist in Syria that is not Assad on the one hand or Daesh on the other. It is not too strong to say that we have betrayed that force. I am talking about the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, which hosted me. They are made up of Kurds, Yazidis, Christians—I met the Syrian Christian communities that were participating—and Sunni Arabs. They went to the city of Kabani, where Daesh/ISIS was first resisted and beaten. When I met their families, I honoured the very young soldiers who had died there. I met the YPJ, the women's forces, whom our troops fought alongside all the way, ultimately, from Kabani to Raqqa; we had a very close military relationship with them. They fought fearlessly and heroically.

The noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, who opened the debate, mentioned that there is a British initiative to encourage the participation of women and girls in the reconstruction of Syria. We have a huge amount to learn from them. I saw a very deeply embedded democratic system. I have coined an unusual phrase to try to describe it: try to imagine a “parish commune” system. It is a very local form of democracy, involving the participation of all the different communities in local assemblies, with only one rule: there has to be a minimum of 40% female participation for that to hold.

So we had allies we fought alongside who were upholding democracy and the participation of women, and who were winning, but we did not stand by them. A very important part of this debate about national security is a reflection on Turkey. I am very reluctant to dissent in any way from the noble Lord, Lord Owen, but in this regard we have to take very seriously the idea that the Turkish state is not a reliable ally at the moment. Not only has it arrested and imprisoned a record number of journalists and sacked more than 100,000 public sector workers, under this very curious

combination of Ataturk and the Muslim Brotherhood—a certain Islamist nationalism—but it has invaded its friend Syria. It has conducted 58 consecutive days of bombing using 78 aircraft, so a NATO partner has invaded Syria. The relentless bombing has led to the displacement of the population, so we can talk without any exaggeration of a systematic policy of ethnic cleansing. It has also paid al-Nusra, al-Qaeda and their Daesh forces to do the actual local fighting on the ground to displace the local population.

So the first question to the noble Earl is: whose side are we on in this? Why are we not being much more resolute in supporting our allies, whom we have fought alongside consistently over the past two years? Why have we stood back? Secondly, we have forces in Manbij, and there are American forces there. There is every indication that Turkey will extend its annexation and invasion to the east. What commitment can he give that the British forces will stay there, because I imagine that Turkey would be reluctant to bomb a fellow NATO partner? That is very important. To what extent are we trying to rebuild and renew our relationship with the PYD and the YPG, which we have fought alongside, and what humanitarian assistance are we giving to the 100,000 refugees who have been displaced from the home they have lived in for 4,000 years?

3.10 pm

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble Lord, Lord Glasman, who speaks with real authority and from recent experience on the Kurds in northern Syria. It is also a privilege to take part in a debate in which two senior national security experts—the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, and the noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Jones—have taken part, and one in which a distinguished former Foreign Secretary has taken part, together with the noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, who presumably has now inherited from Lord Healey the status of the best Foreign Secretary we never had.

I can speak with no particular authority about Syria—I am an amateur—but I am tempted by what the noble Lord, Lord Marlesford, said to go a little further than I did in our discussion on Monday's Statement, when I could speak only about Syria. My theme is the same as that of the noble Lord, Lord Glasman. It is about realism and how I think we need to be a bit more realistic, so I will end up exactly where the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, did at the end of his speech.

I am not clear what our strategy on Syria is now. The one thing that is clear is that it is failing. We are against the Assad regime. We are also against ISIS, which is being beaten by the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian supporters. We say that we support the Kurds, who were the most effective indigenous anti-ISIS force, but we are doing nothing to stop them being killed by the Turks, who are our NATO allies. Iranian influence, huge in Baghdad now, as the noble Lord, Lord Glasman, said, is growing fast in Syria. The risk of an Iranian/Israeli conflict grows every day, as this week's Israeli air strikes show, and the proxy Saudi/Iranian war in Yemen continues with very heavy civilian casualties.

[LORD KERR OF KINLOCHARD]

What is the UK trying to achieve? Saturday's strikes were brilliantly executed, I certainly do not agree that Parliament should have been consulted in advance and I have no doubt about the legality of the action. But the Prime Minister went out of her way in her Statement to make clear that they were not about regime change, yet, as far as I know, our policy is to call for regime change in Syria. It has been our policy for a number of years; there have been no signs of it succeeding, but we still parrot the cry, "Assad must go".

Under Foreign Secretary Hague, we recognised a Syrian Government in exile. Where is that Government now? Under Foreign Secretary Hague, we told the rebel Syrian national army that we would assist them. Where was that assistance and where is that army now?

Breaching our normal practice, we derecognised the regime in Damascus and withdrew our embassy. Assad is still there; we still are not. I see no sign that we have any influence on the Syrian Government. As the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, said, we need to recognise that Assad has won. Of course his is a loathsome regime; I am absolutely not an apologist for the man and I understand the rationale for Saturday's strikes. The Chemical Weapons Convention is important and worth protecting, yet I am uneasy about the strikes.

What was it about this breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention by the Assad regime, unlike previous ones—the Minister spoke of four; Human Rights Watch talks of 50—that triggered a punitive response? I hope it was not just the presence of a television camera. By attacking only chemical weapons sites and stores—no military camps, no containments, no headquarters and no military hardware such as tanks, rockets or artillery—do we risk creating the perception that the regime may kill with impunity provided it does not use chemical weapons?

What were the political and military effects of the strike? I doubt if it won hearts and minds in Syria. Militarily, I was thinking over the weekend about Henry Fox in 1757 attacking the raid on Rochefort under Pitt as breaking windows with guineas. I am uneasy about hit-and-run raids. The middle ground between engagement and disengagement is murky territory. In Iraq, engagement and regime change clearly failed, 500,000 died and the Iranians now call the shots in Baghdad. But in Syria, disengagement, no boots on the ground, proxy forces and bombing has worked no better, with another 500,000 dead in country or on the long, tragic refugee route to an unwelcoming Europe.

I do not know what the answer is. I am not an expert on the region, I cannot answer my own questions, but I have been asking for a couple of years for answers from the Government and I have five particular questions to put today. First, I think we must drop the pretence that present policy on Syria may still succeed. William Pitt's triumph in 1759 came when he dropped the policy and completely overturned the strategy that he had been following at the time of the Rochefort raid. We must accept that Putin, Rouhani and Erdoğan are in charge, Assad will stay there as long as they prop him up and, if he goes, it is they who will pick his successor. Do the Government agree?

Secondly, that means we have to talk seriously to all three of them. I do not believe any of them wants the disintegration of Syria and, with all due respect to the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, I am not sure that Russian and Western interests are always a zero-sum game. The Russians will of course want to retain the influence they have secured and their bases at Tartus and Latakia, but I do not think they want to be sucked into the sort of quagmire that the Americans are in in Afghanistan. I can envisage Russia brokering a compromise between Iran and Israel, with Iran's Shiite allies being allowed to remain in Syria provided they keep their distance from Israel. That may be wrong, but I should like to know what the Government think. Do they feel that we should be in dialogue with the Russians about Syria?

Thirdly, what about a peace process? We should be realistic about the Geneva process, which plainly does not work, and consider some association with the Sochi process, which might work. Do the Government agree?

Fourthly, since American policy in Syria is likely to remain capricious, since Syria is Europe's neighbour, not America's, and since we and the French have historic responsibilities there, I hope that the Government are seeking a common Anglo-French analysis and prescription and will then seek to sell it to wider Europe. A Europe traumatised by the refugee crisis might respond to an Anglo-French lead.

Finally, I hope that the Government will quickly revisit the decision to withdraw the embassy from Damascus. Diplomatic contacts with friends are useful; with foes, they are vital.

3.19 pm

Lord Suri (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friends Lord Ahmad and Lord Howe for arranging this important debate. The attempted assassination of the Skripals was an unjust act, an act against international law and an outrage to this country. The invasion of Ukraine and subsequent annexation of the Crimea was also an unjust act against international law and an outrage against the international community. Russia is a state which has ceased to obey international law. It is rogue, it is criminal and it is dangerous. It strikes at our institutions as well as our citizens. I do not know whether it managed to spread misinformation during any recent elections here, but I do know that its channels, Sputnik and Russia Today, are pure propaganda. No Member of this or the other place should feel comfortable appearing on them. That the former First Minister of Scotland feels entitled to work for a Kremlin-funded channel is nothing short of a disgrace.

I feel great relief that the international community rallied around the UK in our time of great need following the Salisbury attack. Even in New Zealand, where there were no spies to expel, we benefited from international solidarity. Some had assumed that Brexit would blunt our ability to marshal support from our European allies, but we found good will when we were under severe pressure. Russia threatens not only the UK but a great many other of our European allies, especially in the Balkans. The most effective deterrent is of course hard military power. That is why I am strongly in favour of a greater British military presence

in the Balkans and eastern Europe. Russia must not get the impression that NATO solidarity will be undermined. The Balkans have made a conscious choice to buy into the western organisations that they can, and they deserve our support.

On military action, I will be glad to join other noble Lords who support the Prime Minister's decision to launch carefully targeted strikes on strategic targets in Syria. It is a clear breach of international and humanitarian law to use chemical weapons on one's citizens and there needed to be a message that this conduct was unacceptable. I do not support full-scale military engagement, but I think this served as a grim warning to President Assad and his Kremlin backers. As for Russia, I support the ramping up of targeted sanctions on individuals and firms shown to be complicit in Russia's grotesque foreign policy. However, as I have noted before in this House, Brexit has put the ability of the EU to apply targeted sanctions into some doubt. There are civil servants, currently split between the Foreign Office, Treasury and Department for International Trade, who conduct sanctions policy on our behalf and for the EU. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that we will continue to assist the EU on sanctions policy during the period of the transition agreement and after our withdrawal?

A strong network of intelligence also helps to keep us safe. Often, intelligence can be more strategic than better weaponry, and we ought to be armed with both. Intelligence sharing is vital to that. In Europol, we benefit from a large pool of intelligence and secure channels, enabling us to share ours with relevant actors. This is an EU institution, and we do not yet know what our future relationship with it will be, despite it being crucial to our future. Can the Minister update us on what steps are being taken to ensure that the UK is as able to share and receive intelligence after Brexit?

3.25 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): My Lords, I am delighted to contribute to this debate. Some of what I intended to say survives the crime of repetition, but I will dine selectively from my thoughts. I want to make two contributions to this debate: one operational and one perhaps more reflective and strategic in nature.

The operational point relates to the allied air action over Syria last weekend and the surrounding debate about the need for prior parliamentary approval. This has been well covered today. I want to emphasise the extreme complexity of co-ordinating an allied response against what are inevitably time-sensitive targets, through hostile air space, when the retention of speed, security and surprise are prerequisites to both mission success and personnel security. In circumstances where the Government are confident of the moral, legal and intelligence case for action, my firm belief—and I think that this is now widely shared—is that they should retain the ability to act without parliamentary consent, thereby enhancing the chances of a safe and successful mission. They can answer to Parliament subsequently.

However, I would be the first to counsel that, when different factors prevail—when Armed Forces might be committed at scale, when operations are likely to be

enduring and at cost, both in lives and national treasure, and when strategic surprise is not an issue—the Armed Forces are far happier when they know that they have the support of Parliament and wider society. I fear that, in the company of many friends, I have spent too much of my recent life fighting unpopular wars. The Armed Forces want to enjoy the support, not the sympathy, of their nation.

My second contribution is more reflective and concerns the wider character of the global security situation that we currently live in. My reflections are not just those of an ex-Chief of the Defence Staff; I also stake my claim as the 160th Constable of the Tower of London—a place which has borne witness to nigh on 1,000 years of our national story and the conflict that sadly litters it.

My first reflection is that the sources of conflict over time bear remarkable similarities of origin. The three most obvious are the violent pursuit and abuse of political power; the continued maldistribution of wealth and opportunity, both within societies and between countries; and the frequent and often brutal misrepresentation of the morality of great religion. My second reflection would be to lay bare the false notion of the teleological certainty of human betterment, of greater mutual harmony, of enduring and peaceful co-existence and of universal submission to a single set of rules by which the peoples of the world should live. My third reflection is on the remarkably intoxicating power of history's legacy, a legacy we are connected to both rationally and emotionally, and a legacy which is key to understanding the actions and ambitions of both nations and their leaders.

What conclusions do I draw from these reflections? First, inevitable change, often accompanied by violence, is a far better description of mankind's likely future than some idealised and predetermined journey to a state of universal human harmony. Secondly, I think that many countries do not buy into the current rules-based order; indeed, they feel very emotionally that it denies them their sense of historic entitlement. I would certainly include both Russia and Iran in that. Thirdly, the grand strategic challenge of this age is how we accommodate the change which is inevitable while maintaining the stability on which the continued betterment of the human condition absolutely depends.

Finally, having established that peaceful coexistence and a rules-based order are not naturally occurring, we may conclude that they need to be imposed, primarily consensually through alliances of interested parties and occasionally through the willingness of those parties to threaten or use force, but always in the context of thoughtful leadership, wise policy and strong capability. As a nation, we need to decide how prominent a role we wish to play in all this, and in making that decision we need to be mindful of, but not seduced by, the intoxicating power of our own historic legacy. If this last point is a touch esoteric, let me make it more specific and clear.

As a nation, we dangerously congratulate ourselves on spending 2% of GDP on our nation's defence. But, at the same time, we cling to the retention of the totemic military capability of a great power: a gold-standard nuclear deterrent and the two largest carriers

[LORD HOUGHTON OF RICHMOND]

we have ever built, soon to be populated by the latest fifth-generation stealth aircraft. Of course I want these things, but I fear that the balance of our military capability has become the financial regulator which makes such programmes affordable. In being such, that conventional force is both reduced and hollowed out. In the context of the current global security situation, as a nation we need to do much better than that.

3.31 pm

Earl Attlee (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Ahmad for introducing this debate today. It goes without saying that I fully support the recent military action, and we should be proud of and grateful for our Armed Forces' efforts.

There has been much talk about war powers. Even before 2010, I always thought that having a vote in the Commons was foolish in the extreme. Of course debate, where possible, is essential. There are international conventions and treaties such as the Geneva Convention. Then there are our own parliamentary and constitutional conventions such as the Salisbury/Addison convention and the more recent but well-established Carter convention. They have all stood the test of time and seem to work in a variety of circumstances. Unfortunately, this new so-called convention has provided the wrong answer every time it has been used.

In 2003 the House of Commons authorised the illegal and unnecessary Operation Telic to invade Iraq, which was based on flawed intelligence not tested by proper debate in Cabinet, and, so far as I can determine, not tested by very senior Privy Council members of my own party either. I remind the House of my interest: I served on that operation. The noble Lord, Lord West, reminded us of how poor the strategy and how disastrous the history of that operation was. Interestingly, in your Lordships' House we asked, "But what about the post-conflict plan?" Your Lordships were entirely confident that we would have the necessary military superiority over our opponents, and we got the normal platitudes, but, as the noble Lord, Lord West, told us, there was no proper post-conflict plan.

One of the unfortunate effects of the 2003 experience is that it has made the public and parliamentarians less willing to trust the Prime Minister and Government of the day on matters of national security—a point made by my noble friend Lady Neville-Jones. Therefore it was not surprising that in 2013 the House of Commons made another duff decision by declining to authorise military action in Syria, with all the adverse effects that we know about, touched on by many noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts.

The 2003 vote was both pointless and damaging to morale in theatre. I know because I was there at the time. In the division alone we had 25,000 people on the ground who were vulnerable to a legal pre-emptive attack, provided it did not involve prohibited weapons. This is because Iraq had no WMD and we had no UN mandate. Fortunately, the Iraqi armed forces also had no suitable capability to make a first strike. The point is that the then Government had already taken military risks and exposed our forces to attack by authorising the deployment long before any vote took place in the House of Commons.

On morale, in 2003 the vast majority of the deployed force had never been in an operation where they were to make a deliberate large-scale attack on the enemy. Those young men and women needed to know that Parliament and the British people were right behind them. Of course, in a democracy there will be some contrary views, and servicepeople know that perfectly well. Nevertheless, it was deeply disturbing to many on that operation that the Commons was voting on the matter just hours before they were due to cross the start line with the possibility that they might never come back home. The other difficulty about any such vote in the Commons is that MPs are whipped on party lines. I think all noble Lords will agree that authorising or acquiescing to military action is strictly a matter for the House of Commons, although we can express a view.

Many noble Lords opposite who are so keen on a war powers Act were also kind and courageous enough to support me and the noble Baroness, Lady Hollins, in our amendments to the Data Protection Bill. I am now trying to convince just a few Conservative MPs to support us or at least to abstain on the Lords amendments. I am claiming to my colleagues that this is a matter of the first order of importance. However, thanks to the efforts of the Whips in the other place, I have managed to discuss the matter with only two MPs. The usual reply is that it is not something they know anything about and, by implication, they will vote with the Government and are not interested in what I have to say, or they even try to persuade me that I am wrong, which is always a possibility. But only a certain proportion of the membership of the Commons has a knowledge of defence, security and international relations, and even if most Members were at the level of many noble Lords who have spoken today, they still would not have the benefit of the JIC reports or a relationship and deep discussions with CDS—a point well made in general terms by my noble friend Lady Finn.

Another problem with the so-called convention is that it does not include Special Forces operations, for obvious reasons. Quite properly, it is very likely that political authority for most SF operations will be vested in no more than one of three very senior Ministers. If one of these operations went badly wrong, however, the strategic repercussions could be very serious indeed.

I believe that the old system was the correct one. The leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and perhaps two other shadow Secretaries of State should take a briefing on Privy Council terms. If Her Majesty's Opposition absolutely needs to, a vote of confidence in the Government can be called, either before or after the event, although that of course would run the risk of a general election. If the Government lost the vote of confidence, the operation would surely stop immediately. Therefore, the Commons always has the ability to stop an operation if it wants to, but it has that capability without the serious disadvantages attendant on a prior vote.

Much has been said about China. The reality is that, given the size of its economy, the number of well-educated people and its productive capability, it is catching up with the United States and will overtake

it, just as the United States did to us. The reasons are exactly the same. The educated population in the United States overtook ours, and the same thing is happening in China: its educated and productive population is overtaking that of the United States. There is little we can do about that. We just have to manage it.

Our priority is Russia. The United States' priority is dealing with China, and we understand that. However, we can help the United States by being able to deploy with a comprehensive capability. By that, I mean that we can offer a carrier battle group and an amphibious task group, and we ought to be able to deploy at divisional or large-scale level anywhere across the world, except for the Arctic. Partially in answer to the noble Lord, Lord Birt, we need to be able to run a medium-scale operation anywhere with our own carrier battle group capability. If we can do that, we will always be important to the Americans and will maintain that close relationship.

The consensus seems to be that we need to increase our defence expenditure to at least 2.5% and possibly 3%. I remember being somewhat surprised when the noble Lord, Lord Soley, suggested 3% in a relatively recent debate, but I now think he is probably right. However, there is a problem with increasing defence expenditure rapidly. It is not easy to do so without wasting the money. If we increase our capabilities, we need to ensure that those capabilities are balanced, and we are quite good at making sure that that is the case.

We also need to demonstrate that the capability that we already have works. That is why it is essential that exercise Saif Sareea is at least of medium scale—that is, that we deploy at least a brigade. We also need to show as soon as we can that we can deploy at large scale—in other words, a whole division—on an exercise overseas. It is a very long time since we have exercised a fully bombed-up division in the field. If I am not convinced that we can do it properly, I doubt that a peer opponent believes that we can do it, and that is very serious. The Minister may tell the House, as he has told me before, that we can test our capability with computer simulation, but that does not demonstrate to the outside world that we can do it; nor does it fully cover any weaknesses that one might discover in the logistics. I am particularly concerned that we have hollowed out our logistics, and I wonder whether that was what the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton, was referring to. The cost of a large-scale deployment exercise is much lower than the cost of drastically increasing one's capability.

On Assad, I do not want to be unhelpful to my noble friend the Minister, but has he any evidence to suggest that Assad will not win?

3.42 pm

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Earl, Lord Attlee. I speak from a Sikh perspective and I offer my apologies if what I say is out of sync with today's 19th and 20th-century power-bloc politics.

Sikh teachings on the prevention of conflict almost parallel the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formulated after the horror of the

Second World War, and they stress the dignity and equality of all members of our one human family. They also legitimise the use of military force only as a last recourse when all other means have failed. I believe that we and other great powers have pushed the declaration—the key to true peace and security—to one side in our pursuit of supposed “national interest”, using smaller countries as pawns in power-bloc politics. The conflict in Syria is a case study of the futility and cruel effect of such policies on innocent lives.

Following his election, US President Donald Trump made clear his desire to withdraw from international conflicts. Anxious to preserve our special relationship with the USA, our Prime Minister dutifully echoed him, saying that we will have to stop being the world's policeman. A few weeks back, President Trump made clear his desire to extricate the US from the conflict in Syria and was expected to do so with an impressive military flourish.

We are then expected to believe that President Assad, having secured control of much of the country, suddenly decides to launch a chemical attack on a children's hospital. It could be true, although it sounds implausible, but it gave the US President an opportunity to withdraw from the conflict flourishing his military might. France and Britain dutifully backed him in a combined military strike against Assad. President Trump predictably tweeted “Mission accomplished”. It is sad that our PM should feel duty-bound to back military action prior to any investigation. I thought that it was only in *Alice in Wonderland* that we had the saying, “Sentence first—verdict afterwards”.

I find the propaganda in government statements and in the media to justify the military action morally questionable and sometimes hypocritical. We have grown used to the convention of calling countries we do not like “regimes”. Now, to justify action and our intervention, President Assad is widely referred to as a monster. Our PM rightly says that the conflict in Syria can be ended only through negotiations, but it does not help negotiations to call someone a monster. I agree that Assad is no angel and is, like many leaders we have propped up in the Middle East, a brutal dictator. But we should always also remember that his troubles began when, on “humanitarian grounds”, he let in nearly a million Sunni Muslims from the earlier conflict in Iraq. Now, we are being told that the strike against him was on humanitarian grounds.

Are we really saying that it is morally okay to kill and maim the people of Syria with bullets, bombs and missiles, but somehow morally wrong to do so with chemical weapons? I think that our Prime Minister was more honest—but wrong—when, as justification, she said that the action was “in Britain's national interest”. The conflict in Syria is also in Iran's national strategic interest and that of the USA, Russia, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other global players, including ISIS, anxious to have a so-called strategic presence in the Middle East regardless of the horrendous consequences suffered by innocents. In the quagmire of the Middle East, and in trying to punish Assad, we have also helped ISIS in its beheadings and amputations, not only of the people of Syria but of innocent aid workers.

[LORD SINGH OF WIMBLEDON]

I am saddened by the hypocrisy of our Government and the Governments of the USA and France. While wringing their hands about the monster Assad's supposed chemical weapon attack on little children, they have all in the last two or three weeks signed billion-dollar deals with Saudi Arabia to export arms for use in Yemen, so that Saudi Arabia can strut its military might in the Middle East with the continued bombing of men, women and little children in Yemen. Such displays of machismo were the norm in the 19th and 20th centuries, leading to two world wars and countless other conflicts in the pursuit of national or strategic interest and to the continuing death and suffering of millions. An important aspect of strategic action is trade: it is important, but trade should never trump human rights. I was appalled when a Minister openly said that when we talk trade with China we should not raise issues of human rights. The same sentiments have been raised by government officials in the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia to destroy lives in Yemen.

It is not only the West that has lost its moral direction. The same immoral policies are being pursued by Russia, China and others: 80% of the weaponry flooding the world today and fuelling countless conflicts is supplied by members of the so-called Security Council. The whole concept of supposed strategic interest has, over the centuries, been shown to be deeply flawed and a recipe for continuing conflict. A Christian hymn reminds us:

"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin".

It is a truth echoed in Sikh teachings and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The only strategic interest worth pursuing is respect for human rights and social justice for all and for future generations in our highly interdependent world.

3.50 pm

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, this has been yet another impressive debate that demonstrates the huge and diverse expertise among your Lordships. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, for his masterly review of the challenges that the UK faces and his assessment of our strengths and weaknesses. I appreciate that he set aside his engagement with our Commonwealth colleagues so that he could open the debate. As my noble friend Lord Campbell of Pittenweem pointed out, the potential scope of this debate could not be wider. We have ranged across our Armed Forces, our intelligence forces, our ability to counter cyber intrusion, Syria, China, North Korea, Iran, Ukraine, the Crimea, the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, terrorism and much else besides.

I want to step back and look at the *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, a report with which the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, is no doubt familiar. The report said to "expect the unexpected", but what a different country 2015 seems to be, pre-referendum and pre-Trump. A theme running strongly through the report is that:

"Economic security goes hand-in-hand with national security".

It is worth going through the report given that here we are, knowingly heading towards a less economically advantageous position as we apparently seek to leave

our largest trading partner. Anyone who has read the assessments in that DExEU room will see that there is no scenario where our economy would be as strong as if we stayed in the EU.

The risks go beyond that as well. My noble friends Lord Campbell and Lord Wallace have flagged the risks of pulling back from the EU over defence and security. Then there is our Diplomatic Service. In that 2015 document, then Prime Minister Cameron said that,

"we will use our outstanding Diplomatic Service to promote our interests and project our influence overseas".

We do indeed do that, and I pay tribute to those in that service and to their outstanding quality. However, we now see that we are reducing our Diplomatic Service in some parts of the world because we have to strengthen our service in Europe.

Mr Cameron also said:

"Britain's safety and security depends not just on our own efforts, but on working hand in glove with our allies to deal with the common threats that face us all".

He went on to say:

"When confronted by danger, we are stronger together. So we will play our full part in the alliances which underpin our security and amplify our national power".

He then elaborated:

"We will work with our allies in Europe".

We have now apparently set ourselves in another direction. Even if the noble Earl the Minister assures us that we will indeed work closely with our European allies—and I am sure he will—we know that this cannot be as closely as we can do now.

The report speaks of the strengths of each part of the United Kingdom, yet now we threaten Northern Ireland's peace and prosperity. It also notes that:

"The UK is a global leader in science, technology, medicine, energy, and the creative industries. We are home to 18 of the world's top 100 universities"—

all challenged, of course, by Brexit. Blithely unaware, it seems, of what was coming down the track, the 2015 report states:

"We will use our long-term relationships to develop and maintain the alliances and partnerships that we rely on every day for our security and prosperity".

It goes on to state:

"Our special relationship with the US remains essential to our national security. It is founded on shared values, and our exceptionally close defence, diplomatic, security and intelligence cooperation".

Clearly, we were not able to predict Trump. But this is where our belonging to the EU should help to bolster that alliance in such circumstances. I note, like my noble friend Lord Wallace, that Merkel and Macron will visit the US together next week, and we are not included. The report continues:

"We are extending and expanding our defence and security relationships with our European partners, notably France ... and Germany. We have close relationships with all EU member states".

So thought the Government in 2015.

Then there is the reference to the International Court of Justice. Unsupported by our erstwhile EU partners, we lost the UK judge on the ICJ for the first time in its existence. The 2015 report notes the scale of our trade with the EU, and that the US and Europe remain the largest investors in the UK. Moreover, it states:

“Through the EU, we have free trade agreements covering more than 50 of our trading partners, which remove barriers to business and open up markets”.

It sounds like a sensible national strategy to support such an approach, one would have thought.

The 2015 report concluded by considering a series of tier 1 risks, including cybersecurity, chemical and biological attacks and proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons—issues that we have considered today. One of those tier 1 risks was identified as,

“undermining of our military and economic alliances and institutions”.

The fundamental assumptions of that 2015 national security review are notable for the emphasis on the importance of the economic strength of the UK and on its fundamental alliances with a stable, globally facing United States and with our European neighbours and allies. It was, however, spot-on that we needed to “expect the unexpected”—a phrase that my father often used to use when he taught me to drive. We face such global challenges, where working together is vital. As the noble Lord, Lord Birt, mentioned, a key area is climate change, where working with our European allies helped to secure the Paris climate change treaty. Then there is the rise of China, to which the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Neville-Jones and Lady Helic, so powerfully referred.

Then I come to Syria, which was indeed the reason why this debate was scheduled. My noble friend Lord Campbell laid out what he identified as the legal case for making the targeted attack as a result of the regime’s use of chemical weapons, and almost all noble Lords have addressed the situation in Syria. I picked up no disagreement in regard to the recent intervention over chemical weapons, although there were some challenges over whether Parliament should have been consulted before, or whether being held to account afterwards was more appropriate.

Here I am going to reiterate the interesting phrase used by the noble Lord, Lord West, about a certain “nasty bastard”, as then *Hansard* cannot clean up his language. I discovered that a number of years ago when a noble Lord used a much ruder phrase and my query as to how *Hansard* would render that meant that *Hansard* had to record it exactly as it was expressed. My kids then challenged me to get included in *Hansard* similar rude words, which I have failed thus far to do. But on Syria, rightly, noble Lords have emphasised how important it is to identify the dangers of the conflict there—the huge and potentially catastrophic risks of an Israeli/Iranian conflict, of the Turkish/Kurdish clashes to which the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, referred, and the involvement of Saudi Arabia, Russia and others.

Right now, the best prospect for a resolution seems to be in the Russian-supported talks, where a constitutional convention is being discussed. We need to look long term at accountability and justice, as the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, rightly emphasised. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, and others, are right that we must engage with Russia, whether we regard it, as he does, as a gangster state, or as the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, said, as now engaged in a second Cold War. The Russians or Putin easily portray themselves as walled-up

and under attack from the West. That may help to shore up Putin, but it does not help to solve these international problems.

This has indeed been a wide-ranging debate and I know that we will have a suitably wide-ranging and very thoughtful response from the noble Earl the Minister. Noble Lords have conveyed with great insight the seriousness of the range of challenges facing the world and, therefore, us in the UK. What strikes me is how the assessments of 2015, only three years ago, rightly identified areas that we must address for our security, and that a fundamental assumption was that we would be promoting Britain’s prosperity and security through the European Union. Comparing the 2015 national security strategy with the one just issued shows how vital it is that we urgently address every aspect of the potential loss of our position within the EU, as we seek to defend ourselves and play our part in addressing the huge range of challenges that we face in the world today.

4.02 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, for introducing this debate. It has been incredibly wide-ranging across a huge number of difficult subjects. I add my own appreciation to the noble Lord for his actions on the humanitarian side of the Government’s policy and for his actions this week in terms of CHOGM in promoting those issues and ensuring that we get movement from the heads of Government.

In seven years of bloodshed, as we have heard, the war in Syria has claimed half a million lives and, we should not forget, also driven 11 million people from their homes, causing a humanitarian tragedy on a scale unknown anywhere else in the world. That tragedy has repercussions in terms of refugees across not only the Middle East but Europe too. It has huge consequences.

As my noble friend Lady Smith said in her opening remarks, it is impossible to consider our response to recent events without examining our own national security and our international role in a long-term strategy for peace in regions of conflict. As she argued, there can be no justification for the use of chemical weapons, yet the Syrian President’s use of chemical weapons against civilians is well documented, with the shameful attack on Douma being the latest and most serious, with hundreds of people affected and around 70 dead.

Whatever lessons are to be learnt from recent events, one thing that needs to be considered is the ability of the institutions that have the job of investigating and gathering evidence of such crimes. As was put so ably by the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, individuals who commit crimes against humanity should know that they cannot act with impunity and will be held to account. The use of chemical weapons is a serious global issue, and we should work internationally, through the United Nations, to ensure that such weapons cannot be manufactured or used in conflict.

Some people ask what the point of the UN process is when Russia can veto action. Let us be clear on what happened at the UN last week. Quite simply, Russia

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

claimed that there had not been a chemical weapons attack in Douma, while the US, UK and others claimed not just that there had been an attack but that they had proof that Assad was responsible. Russia said that it would not agree to an investigation if other parties had already predetermined the outcome before waiting for definite proof that a chemical attack had taken place. That was the nature of the stand-off. In that situation, a series of steps could be worked through—step one being allowing the UN-mandated inspectors into Douma for the OPCW to verify that there was an attack and identify the chemical weapons used. That process is happening now. Then, the OPCW needs to go back to the UN with its report and evidence.

I say this because that exact process was followed in 2013 after the chemical attacks on Ghouta. There was a UN inspection, which reported back. That led to a Russia-US agreement to destroy hundreds of tonnes of Assad's chemical weapons and agents. Clearly, that agreement did not go far enough, but it shows that progress on these issues on the basis of the independent reports of UN-mandated inspectors is possible. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons can continue its inspections, report the evidence and allow the UN to consider its next steps?

When the Government made the case for military intervention in Syria three years ago, they did so purely on the basis of the need to stop Daesh establishing a safe haven in the country. We have received reports on the progress that has been made there—progress that has certainly not come without a cost. As the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, has said in previous debates, the humanitarian crisis and suffering of the Syrian people continues.

The recent action has been taken on humanitarian grounds without prior parliamentary debate. As my noble friend said, the Government have not yet indicated how they reached a judgment of not needing debate. The desire from these Benches is to have greater clarity from the Government on the principles of consulting, debating and voting in Parliament in advance of military action. That sort of democratic engagement is preferable to the advance warning of military action given in tweets by President Trump.

From my perspective and that of my noble friend, it is clear from today's debate that any expression of concern about that issue does not represent a desire to hinder necessary intervention. A Labour Government would always intervene if our country was attacked—or to protect our civilians and allies overseas—without hesitation. If we had a situation again like Kosovo or Sierra Leone, where Labour Governments intervened in a limited way in emergency situations to prevent the impending massacre of civilians and support peacekeepers on the ground, let us be absolutely clear that that would be the right thing to do.

But what of the future in Syria? We have heard across the Chamber the view that increasing our direct military intervention will not do anything other than increase and prolong the suffering of the Syrian people. As recognised by many noble Lords, we cannot achieve a military victory in Syria—not without a huge cost to

ourselves, hundreds of thousands more civilian deaths and the risk, of course, of triggering direct conflict with Russia. To me, that is unacceptable.

Alistair Burt, the Minister of State for the Middle East, has said repeatedly that the best opportunity for peace and security is,

“to support the Geneva process ... and to work as hard as we are diplomatically to get the parties to find a better answer to the conflict”.—[*Official Report*, Commons 12/3/18; col. 677.]

As difficult as it is, we must renew the efforts to get all non-jihadist parties around a table, with no preconditions, agree a ceasefire and work out a long-term political solution. That is the only way war will end. If part of that solution requires UN peacekeepers on the ground, then, as the leader of the Opposition said on Sunday, there may be a role for UK forces in that.

In the last strategic defence and security review, great stress was placed on the UK's commitment to a rules-based international order. The dangers of seeing that international order unravel are multifold. We have heard many points about that expressed in the debate. Of course, the dangers are caused not least because President Trump has a fondness for unpredictability—a characteristic long noted as dangerous in foreign policy. Trump started 2018 with a flurry of tweets that sparked protests across the world, caught allies off guard and further divided opinion in Washington.

The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, said in a debate last year that,

“the rules-based international order, so painstakingly built up over the 70 years since the disasters of two world wars, is currently under greater challenge than it has ever been”.

That has been totally reinforced by noble Lords in today's debate. He suggested that,

“the response so far of countries such as ours ... which still regarded its maintenance as a national interest ... has been quite inadequate in the face of those challenges”.

We need, as he put it,

“to make a better job than we have done in the past of setting out a compelling case for the benefits of a rules-based international order”.—[*Official Report*, 19/1/17; col. 390-1.]

That case needs to cover, as we have heard in the debate, a whole range of our international commitments, not just to the United Nations, which I passionately believe in, but also our obligations to NATO and to the World Trade Organization. Of course, it also means making absolute common cause with like-minded countries and our former partners in the European Union. That is another key element of this debate. I hope the Minister will be able to respond very clearly to the questions that have been put to him by all noble Lords, not least the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, on what will be the mechanism to maintain what has been incredibly effective co-operation, which has achieved a coherent policy with our allies to meet the challenges we face. We need to understand what will be coming in terms of how we achieve that ongoing co-operation.

Much of the *National Security Capability Review* is about how the Government use diplomats, development assistance, Armed Forces, security and intelligence agencies, law enforcement and soft power to protect and promote our interests and values. If we are going to have the international security and stability that we seek, development, defence and diplomacy have to go

together. As we have heard in this debate, particularly from the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, not only should we assert that need, but we must demonstrate a joined-up, whole-government approach with a strategy that is properly funded.

We have heard from many noble Lords, particularly in my noble friend's introduction to this debate, about defence spending and the need to increase it. We should not forget, however, that the UK spends less per head on diplomacy than the US, Germany, France, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. We need to ensure that we properly understand that we must meet our obligations with the proper and necessary resources.

The noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, referred to sanctions. Of course, that is another effective tool in our armoury that has been diminished by our exiting the European Union. We had a long debate about the sanctions Bill. I would like to hear from the Minister just how effective he believes sanctions are, particularly those in the context of Syria and Russia and those in response to the attacks that took place in our own country. I would be grateful if he would explain exactly how he thinks the system is now working. I am particularly concerned about Syria: it was disappointing that the Chancellor was not aware of the value of Syrian assets in the United Kingdom. It does not have to be that way. As noble Lords know from the debates that we have had in this Chamber, particularly on the sanctions Bill, the Government could accelerate the introduction of the full public register of the real owners of UK property. It is concerning that the Government have dragged their feet on this issue and have delayed the implementation of the overseas property register, weakening the ability of our authorities to tackle corruption and international terrorism. According to international reports, the UK is recouping far less in corrupt assets from individuals linked to the Syrian regime than other countries.

I have banged on a bit too long in my response today, but I want to reiterate the point made by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, in relation to the new fusion doctrine, which involves using our security, economic and influence capabilities to maximum effect to protect our national security and economy and influence our goals. Applying this doctrine to Russia, the Prime Minister said that our approach to that country is to "engage but beware". To be honest, I feel that the Government's strategy on Russia is not delivering on either of these.

4.19 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Earl Howe) (Con): My Lords, it comes as no surprise to me that a debate devoted to our national security should have elicited so many contributions of real depth and insight from your Lordships, and I therefore begin by thanking all those who have taken the trouble to speak this afternoon. To my mind, a number of big themes have emerged and many noble Lords have recognised that our national security situation today is more serious than at any point since the end of the Cold War. As my noble friend Lord Ahmad made clear, it is the depth and breadth of the threats we face that is different now, and even greater than when we last assessed them fully, in the 2015 SDSR.

What is also clear is that we face a range of threats from state powers, not just the terrorists and insurgents who have often been the focus of recent debates. Particular events are fresh in all our minds. In recent weeks Salisbury and Syria have shown that chemical warfare, a scourge of the early twentieth century, is still something that we need to counter. As a Government, we have endeavoured to show leadership against these two brutal attacks; first, by attributing and exposing them, which improves understanding of the nature of the threat; secondly, by proposing and implementing tough responses, which raise the cost for those adversaries who would otherwise act with impunity; and thirdly, by building international support that ensures that our responses are even more effective and maximise the combined effect, whether through diplomatic expulsions after Salisbury or the precision of the missile strikes in Syria last weekend. A heavy price has been paid by our adversaries and we have sent a crystal-clear message.

On Syria, we know that our response to the CW attack degrades Assad's capabilities and we hope it deters further chemical weapon use. As noble Lords know from earlier statements, our response was not designed to change the fundamental course of that conflict. However, we remain clear that the only appropriate outcome in Syria is a negotiated settlement that takes account of legitimate grievances. I will say more about that later. While on occasion we are obliged to be reactive, this Government are determined not to be buffeted by security crises, but to shape them by internationalising our agenda. NATO is at the heart of our defence approach. The alliance has taken important and lasting steps in recent years to build a robust response to the challenge posed by Russia.

The Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 made clear in stark terms that the rules-based order is under threat and the free choices of European states must not be taken for granted. NATO's enhanced forward presence in the Baltic states and Poland, along with air and naval patrols north and south, have shown a clear commitment to collective defence, while being measured and non-escalatory. The UK is one of the most active contributors. An ever-stronger deterrent is being built with a NATO badge. This coming October the alliance will hold its biggest exercise of the year in and around Norway. It will involve some 35,000 forces from 30 countries, with as many as 70 ships and 130 aircraft. The UK will play a full part, contributing Royal Navy and Royal Air Force platforms and an Army HQ. This training will show that NATO is credible and able to operate at an impressive scale with integrated multinational forces. This year's NATO summit will also reform command structures and refocus on the north Atlantic as a contested environment on which the outgoing Chief of the Defence Staff has placed great emphasis.

Russia uses what some have termed "reflexive control" to deceive us and manipulate domestic and international audiences, as well as intimidate the West. We must not fall victim to this or succumb to the Kremlin's agenda. Its narrative is filled with disinformation and conspiracy theories that aim to weaken our unity and responses. We must also resist exaggerating the threat in the way that Moscow wants or following its feints when it

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seeks to distract us. Instead, we must and will expose the genuine attacks that it seeks to hide. The Government issued a *démarche* to Russia earlier this year over its NotPetya cyberattack in Ukraine and drew attention to the evidence for Russia's role in the Montenegro coup attempt back in 2016. Deception is one facet of what our American colleagues call "grey zone conflict"—the space between peace and war where Russia acts with far less ethical or legal constraint and, importantly, strives to stay below our threshold of response. The range of hostile acts we face in this grey zone, including cyber, subversion and information warfare, can be serious. To counter threats of this kind, we must prepare to do so with allies and partners. All the time, we strive with them to appreciate the full scope of the threats and ensure our ability to respond. The modernising defence programme and the NATO summit in the summer are important parts of our developing approaches.

On geography and reach, our well-justified refocus on the euro-Atlantic region does not mean acting at the expense of our expeditionary ability or our long-standing commitment to security in the Arabian Gulf. This year will see the UK deploy some 4,500 members of the Armed Forces to the Gulf for Exercise Saif Sareea 3. That demonstration of our ability to project power at distance and intervene if required shows the flexibility, reach and capability of our Armed Forces and sends a strong message to our adversaries in the Middle East and globally that they should not assume a free hand.

Understandably, the role of Parliament has been a subject of discussion this week and in this debate. The noble Baroness the Leader of the Opposition asked me to clarify the Government's position. The Government take their responsibilities when using force most seriously. Combat operations receive the closest scrutiny and attention. I say to the noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton, that we share the principle that Parliament should be able to debate the deployment of UK military forces in combat. However, we must be clear that, for the success of some such deployments, we must not shackle all decisions on the use of force to pre-authorisation by Parliament. Had we done that in relation to the recent military action, it would have weakened our operational security by divulging military choices openly, including to our enemies. It would also have undermined our imperative for speed of decision and action. An adversary with more time to prepare for our response will naturally be better able to evade the action against him. I was grateful for the comments of my noble friend Lady Finn in that regard. Our ability to exploit uncertainty and maximise the element of surprise played a critical part in the success of the operation. Those two very reasonable concerns are supported by those in government and the Armed Forces who are seasoned in planning military action.

The noble Lord, Lord Campbell, asked me what would happen if Mr Assad staged a repetition of the chemical attacks of 7 April. Our actions were designed to disrupt the Syrian regime's ability to conduct such attacks and to prevent further unacceptable human suffering. We know that we have not destroyed every part of Assad's chemical warfare capability—that was

not the intention—but we hope and believe that UK and allied action will deter such attacks in future in Syria, and deter others from believing that they can use chemical weapons with impunity. It is in our national interest to prevent the further use of chemical weapons in Syria and to defend the global consensus that those weapons should not be used. Syria and others should be in no doubt of our resolve to uphold international norms and values.

The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, expressed concern that the strikes should worry the wider Arab community. They should not. This was a limited, targeted and effective strike with clear boundaries that expressly sought to avoid escalation and did everything possible to prevent civilian casualties. It was not about intervening in a civil war. My noble friend Lord Dobbs was spot on about that. To the noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris, I emphasise that the legal basis for our participation in the strikes is humanitarian intervention. We have published that legal position. The UK is permitted under international law, on an exceptional basis, to take measures to alleviate overwhelming humanitarian suffering. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Singh, to whom I listened with great respect, that the evidence of the Syrian regime's culpability for the chemical weapons attack is very strong indeed.

The noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, asked whether the decision-making process leading up to the strikes was fully Chilcot-compliant. He, along with my noble friends Lord Attlee and Lady Pidding, will wish to know that throughout the planning stages, officials and Ministers have been acutely aware of learning lessons from the past and we have sought to apply the recommendations in the Chilcot report rigorously. From the start, we deliberately used structured and independent internal oversight and sought challenge from France and the US, and other agencies. A key component of that was the JIC process.

Decision-makers were informed directly by subject matter experts and an audit trail has been constructed throughout. We based our decision-making on an assessment from all sources available to us. We agreed a clear and realistic objective, developed a robust plan and allocated the appropriate resources. We considered a range of scenarios and developed contingency planning and preventative action. We gave space for debate and challenge, including through officials' meetings in COBRA and ministerial meetings in the National Security Council and the Cabinet. Key to the operation were the consequence management assessments. We ran through a number of scenarios and then worked on plans for de-escalating the situation. The whole focus of the operation was a humanitarian one, so the focus on not causing casualties was inherent in the targeting from the start.

My noble friend Lady Helic, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, the noble Lords, Lord West, Lord Campbell and Lord Hylton, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Coventry asked about the future strategy for Syria and the game plan for ending the conflict. Mr Assad's regime bears overwhelming responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. His oppression has caused untold human suffering, fuelled extremism and terrorism and created the space for Daesh. It has

been suggested that we should recognise the reality of the Assad regime and rebase our diplomatic policy in the light of that. I listened carefully and respectfully to the noble Lords, Lord Kerr and Lord Campbell, and others on that issue. However, I am afraid that I cannot offer any comfort to them.

The image of an ambassador of Her Majesty shaking hands with Mr Assad following a restoration of diplomatic relations with Syria is anathema to me and my ministerial colleagues. We believe that the Assad regime has lost all legitimacy, due to its atrocities against the Syrian people. In our view, a sustainable political settlement in Syria requires a political transition. For that reason, we remain committed to achieving our long-standing goals in Syria: defeating the scourge of Daesh and achieving a political settlement that ends the war and suffering, one which provides stability for all Syrians and the wider region. What should that look like?

Lord West of Spithead: Does the Minister believe that there is any possibility whatever of getting a diplomatic solution if we try to ignore Assad, who is a fact of life on the ground? Looking back over the years, Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of this country have had to shake hands with some pretty loathsome people because that is realpolitik—what the world is like—much as we do not like them. But if you do not do it, things can become worse.

Earl Howe: We certainly believe that Mr Assad needs to be a part of the negotiations leading to a long-term solution, as I shall explain. There needs to be a transition to a new, inclusive and non-sectarian Government who can protect the rights of all Syrians and unite the country, but we are pragmatic about how to achieve that.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard: In my time in the Foreign Office, recognition was not a seal of approval; the recognition was that somebody was in control. We have a mission in Pyongyang and in all sorts of places where shaking hands might not be what the noble Earl would wish to do, but that is what we are paid to do. We diplomats are paid to find out what the other lot are up to, and it is most important in relation to one's foes.

Earl Howe: I take the point, but I repeat that our view is that there needs to be a transition to a different regime, despite everything the noble Lord has just said. Syria's future must be for Syrians to decide.

Lord Marlesford: With great respect, there really is confusion in what my noble friend says. One moment he is saying that Assad has to be involved; the next moment he is saying that there has to be regime change; then he contradicts the idea that you have to talk to people of whom you disapprove and negotiate with them. It seems to me that, far from learning from the mistakes of the past, we are digging our heels into them.

Earl Howe: If my noble friend will be patient for just a minute, I think I can elucidate the point of confusion that he has just enunciated.

The UN-led Geneva process between the Syrian parties, mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2254, remains the forum for reaching a lasting political settlement to end the conflict in Syria. The latest round was held in Vienna on 25 and 26 January. All international efforts need to be in support of the UN-led process. The Syrian negotiation commission engages constructively and without preconditions, but clearly to achieve progress the Assad regime must also engage credibly in Geneva and Russia must use all its influence to ensure that it does. I hope that that clarifies our approach.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith, asked what other international action might be put in train. Shortly ahead of us are the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting and the NATO summit where we will discuss Syria further with our international partners. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 April, the EU 28 agreed further sanctions. I can assure the noble Baroness in particular that we will use all feasible existing avenues to achieve the settlement that I am sure we all desire to see.

The noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked me for an update on the OPCW inspection in Douma. We are deeply concerned by the news that UN security officials in Douma, in advance of the OPCW inspectors' planned visit, came under fire. It is imperative that all parties offer the OPCW fact-finding mission team their full co-operation and assistance to carry out their difficult task. On 18 April, UN security personnel advising and supporting the OPCW fact-finding mission were engaged in further discussions and co-ordination with representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian military police on how to enhance and reinforce the security arrangements. Clearly, this is a fast-moving situation.

The noble Baroness also asked what support the UK is giving to refugees in the light of the Dubs amendment. As she knows, we are committed to resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees by 2020. As of December 2017, a total of 570 had been resettled through the vulnerable children's resettlement scheme since it began in 2016. That is in addition to those we resettle under our gateway and mandate schemes and the thousands who receive protection in the UK under normal asylum procedures. In 2017, 6,212 people were provided with protection and support under a resettlement scheme in the UK.

The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, asked what our assessment is of Turkey's invasion of northern Syria, a topic also raised by the noble Lords, Lord Owen and Lord Glasman, among others. We are closely following developments in Afrin and wider north-western Syria. We are concerned about recent reports of civilian casualties and tens of thousands of people fleeing the violence. The UK Government have called for de-escalation and the protection of civilians while recognising Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders. Ministers have urged their Turkish counterparts to do everything they can to minimise humanitarian suffering. We support the ongoing discussions between Turkey and the US and believe that a negotiated agreement, taking into account the security concerns of both parties, is necessary to prevent further conflict. The Prime Minister has raised the

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need for protection for civilians and proper humanitarian access with President Erdoğan, as has my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary with his Turkish counterpart.

The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, asked whether we were sending our envoy to Kobane. I have to say to both him and the noble Lord, Lord Glasman, that the UK has had only occasional diplomatic contact with the PYD but we will certainly use that channel to discuss the situation in Syria and the region. The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, also asked whether we had asked Saudi and Gulf states to cut off money and weapons to al-Nusra. We have close dialogue with Saudi and Gulf states on Syria, including on how to counter extremism and extremist groups.

To reassure the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and to answer my noble friend Lady Helic, we have a long-standing commitment to accountability for human rights abuses in Syria. The UK is at the forefront of global efforts to bring Daesh to justice for its crimes, about which the noble Lord, Lord Glasman, spoke so movingly. In September 2017, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted the UK-drafted Daesh accountability Resolution 2379, co-sponsored by 46 member states including Iraq. The resolution calls for the UN Secretary-General to establish an investigative team to collect, preserve and store evidence of Daesh crimes, beginning in Iraq. The team will be led by a special adviser with a mandate to promote the need to bring Daesh to justice across the globe. The UK has committed an initial £1 million to support the resolution and help to set up the UN investigate team. The resolution is focused exclusively on Daesh. The question of accountability for other actors in Syria, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere will continue to be pursued through other efforts.

My noble friend Lady Helic suggested that the UK funding of Syrian hospitals was only around £200,000. That is not correct. To date, DfID has provided £37 million to the World Health Organization, which operates in Syria. UK aid contributes to supporting vital health facilities in hospitals, offering first aid, trauma care, primary health services and reproductive health services. Since 2012, UK support in Syria has helped to provide 8 million medical consultations and over 3 million vaccines. The UK has committed £2.46 billion since the start of the conflict, our biggest ever response to a humanitarian crisis.

The noble Lord, Lord Wallace, asked whether we had a dialogue with Iran. We are committed to tackling Iran's destabilising activity in the region, particularly its ballistic missile programme and proliferation, through the JCPOA. The Minister for the Middle East was clear about this when he met his Iranian counterpart in February. We believe these matters need to be dealt with outside the JCPOA and, importantly, the deal allows us to do that.

The noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, spoke about the *National Security Capability Review*. The NSCR report explains how the Government are taking a transformative whole-of-government approach to national security in response to the worsening security situation. The approach is referred to in the report as the "fusion doctrine", and it is designed to ensure that the UK makes better

use of all our capabilities through economic levers and cutting-edge military resources to our wider diplomatic and cultural influence on the world stage. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, spoke of the need for culture change across Whitehall if the fusion doctrine set out in the NSCR is to become a reality. I agree with them and am confident that it can be done. There are several good examples of such cross-government working—

Baroness Helic: If I may correct the Minister, I made no reference whatever to hospitals. I would be grateful if he could actually answer the question I asked about the investigating mechanism that has been put in place. I believe the records say that the UK Government have committed £200,000 but that for the overall start-up programme to start will cost \$14 million. I would just like to correct that.

Earl Howe: I am grateful to my noble friend. That was my misunderstanding and I will write to her with clarification on that point.

As I was saying, there are several good examples of good cross-government working. The *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* has seen the MoD, the FCO and DfID coming together very effectively. Another example is international peacekeeping, where we have seen successful co-ordination between those three departments. It can be done, and it will be.

In that context, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, asked about resources for community policing with a counterterrorism focus, as did the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria. The Government understand that police demand is changing, becoming increasingly complex. That is why, after speaking to all forces in England and Wales, we have provided a comprehensive funding settlement which is increasing total investment in the police system by more than £460 million in 2018-19. That includes £50 million for counterterrorism. The 2015 spending review and the SDSR protected funding for counterterrorism until 2020-21.

My noble friend Lord Suri, the noble Lords, Lord Wallace, Lord Owen and Lord Campbell, the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and others spoke about the effect of Brexit on our contribution to European security. As the Government have said many times, we are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe.

At the December European Council, the Prime Minister and other Heads of State welcomed the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation, PESCO, as a useful tool to support the development of capabilities that Europe needs for its security, provided that it remains complementary to NATO and encourages EU-NATO co-operation. The UK's approach reflects our continuing commitment to European defence and security and to protecting the interests of UK industry. The UK has not joined PESCO—after leaving the EU, we cannot be a member of PESCO—but that does not diminish our wish to collaborate on the development of capabilities that we need for our shared security, which may include PESCO projects.

The way in which the UK may continue to take part in CSDP missions and operations is an issue that we are actively discussing with the EU Commission. The noble Lord, Lord Wallace, mentioned the European

Defence Agency in particular. That is likely to be a key route by which we can continue to participate in European collaborative capability development and protect UK defence industry interests. The Prime Minister has made clear that we want to explore terms on which the UK could remain part of EU agencies, including the EDA.

I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, that our defence relationship with France is deepening, not reducing. France is our most important defence partner after the USA. It is the only other European state that can deploy significant military forces globally on operations. We work closely with France on international security issues and military operations and have regular contact at all levels. We want to continue to deepen and broaden our defence and security relationship with France under the Lancaster House treaties, while also working towards a deep and special UK-EU partnership for the future that contributes to the prosperity, security and global power of Europe. The 2018 UK-France summit held at Sandhurst in January reaffirmed the strength of our defence and security relationship with France. France is one of several European countries with which we are strengthening our defence ties.

More broadly, in March 2018, the Foreign Secretary announced the creation of at least 250 new diplomatic roles and 10 new sovereign missions over the next two years, and today he has announced another nine new missions in Commonwealth countries.

Inevitably, the subject of UK defence spending was raised by several noble Lords, notably the noble Lord, Lord Owen, and my noble friend Lady Neville-Jones. The first duty of government is the safety and security of the British people at home and abroad. That is why we have committed to meeting the NATO guideline of spending at least 2% of our GDP on defence and to increasing our defence budget by at least 0.5% above

inflation every year of this Parliament. The UK is one of the few allies to meet both NATO spending guidelines—that is not only the 2% of GDP but committing 20% of annual defence expenditure to major equipment and associated research and development.

I in no way wish to sound complacent. It is of course outputs rather than inputs that really matter. Indeed, the whole purpose of the modernising defence programme is to throw a clearer light on our defence needs and priorities and the resources required to deliver them. The whole purpose of the MDP is to ensure that defence is configured to address the evolving threats that we face while being sustainable and affordable. As the Defence Secretary and the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff have said, we aim to achieve better military capability and better value for money. The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, will appreciate that, because this process is ongoing, I cannot yet answer his questions about specific capabilities. We intend to be able to share MDP headline conclusions by the summer.

I fear I would be testing the patience of the House if I continued much further. Let me therefore assure noble Lords that, on those issues and questions that I have not had time to address or answer in my response today, I will write as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the Government will not be narrowly focused on the threats manifested most recently in Salisbury and Syria. Our long-term strategic challenges are critical, even where these attacks reveal facets of those greater challenges. With the recent national security capability review as a basis, and with the modernising defence programme to come this summer, the Government will show how we will strengthen our standing as a respected leader on international security.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 4.50 pm.

