

Vol. 801
No. 4



Tuesday
7 January 2020

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS
OFFICIAL REPORT

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The first time a Member speaks to a new piece of parliamentary business, the following abbreviations are used to show their party affiliation:

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
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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

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House of Lords

Tuesday 7 January 2020

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Rochester.

Oaths and Affirmations

2.35 pm

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

Lord Speaker's Statement

2.45 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, as we return from the Christmas break, on behalf of the whole House I would like to express my deepest sympathies to the people of Australia, who have endured and continue to endure such crippling hardship as a result of widespread wildfires. The loss of human life and the devastation caused to the wildlife and the environment is tragic. Our Commonwealth ties with Australia speak of our shared history and our shared values, and I have written to my counterpart in Canberra, the president of the Australian Senate, to convey our thoughts and our prayers. At this incredibly difficult time for the Australian people, I would like to assure them of our total support.

Death of a Member: Lord Williams of Elvel

Announcement

2.46 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, I regret to inform the House of the death of our friend the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Elvel, on 30 December 2019. On behalf of the House, I extend our condolences to the noble Lord's family and friends, and of course to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Hammersmith Bridge

Question

2.46 pm

Asked by Lord Dubs

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support, if any, they are giving to the repair of Hammersmith Bridge.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con): My Lords, while transport in London is devolved and the maintenance of London's roads is a matter for Transport

for London and the London boroughs, we recognise the vital importance of this key river crossing for the people of London and will consider any proposals put forward by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in conjunction with TfL.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for the Answer as far as it goes. Does the Minister agree that this will be an enormous financial burden either on the local authorities adjacent to the bridge or on Transport for London? Should not the Government's infrastructure fund—the announcement of £600 million or so—be devoted, at least in part, to rebuilding the bridge? If not, it will stay unused, except by bicycles and pedestrians, for many years.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I agree with the noble Lord that Hammersmith and Fulham might not have the financial resources, or perhaps the skills, to repair the bridge on its own. As it is an asset that benefits a wider area in London, the responsibility perhaps lies more broadly, and I expect that TfL will take a role in driving the project forward. As I have mentioned, we have not yet received any request for funding from TfL, but we will of course consider it should it arise.

Baroness Kramer (LD): My Lords, might I declare an interest in that I live only a few yards from the end of Hammersmith Bridge? During the election campaign, quite a number of Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Transport and Treasury Ministers, came and made little videos at the end of the bridge. I was the elderly-looking lady in a hat with grocery bags standing in front of them. They committed to full financing being immediately available with no questions. I hope that they will also follow through and provide financing for the temporary pedestrian and cycle bridge necessary to speed up the repair work.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: My Lords, certainly not elderly, I am sure. I, too, made one of those videos—perhaps the noble Baroness did not see it. The key thing is that we said we would consider any proposals put to us. If the noble Baroness goes back to the videos, I think she will find that that was indeed the case. We will consider all proposals, but it will be up to TfL to put forward proposals according to its priorities. I remind the noble Baroness, however, that TfL has a budget of around £10 billion. Within that budget, the streets funding stream has operating costs of £500 million. There is also a pot for capital investment of £250 million.

Lord Aberdare (CB): My Lords, I also declare an interest as a Barnes resident. Can the Minister give an assurance that it will always remain possible for pedestrians and bicycles to cross at Hammersmith while the bridge is being repaired, and that the new bridge will be designed with a long-term lifespan, rather than be yet another short-term fix for a few years?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord is quite right. I understand that TfL and Hammersmith and Fulham both want to keep the bridge open to cyclists

[BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON]
and pedestrians. I understand that there is a proposal to put some sort of temporary bridge alongside the existing structure, which will help active transport and other things like that. As for repairs for the future, the noble Lord is quite right. This bridge was built in 1887 for horses, carts and penny farthings, so it is clear that we need repairs that will last for decades to come.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): My Lords, I am afraid I also have to declare an interest. Does the Minister think that there are lessons to be learned from this for the long term? It has been predicted for years that Hammersmith Bridge will require major repairs and funding. Why was a proper fund not built up with this kind of contingency in mind?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I believe that is indeed the case. That question might, therefore, be better directed at the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who has responsibility for transport in London.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): Does the Minister recall that, during the general election, Mr Boris Johnson pledged to consider building a bridge from Northern Ireland to Scotland, even though there are hundreds of tonnes of explosives in Beaufort's Dyke, put there because it was supposedly a safe place? If the Government cannot keep Hammersmith Bridge open, how on earth are they going to manage to do that? Is this going to go ahead?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord is quite right. We have indeed asked officials to look at various options for bridges which would strengthen our union, and I understand that there is some talk of a potential tunnel, now that tunnelling costs are cheaper than they used to be. Watch this space, but perhaps do not hold your breath.

Baroness Tonge (Non-Aff): My Lords, is the Minister aware that in the same part of London there is something called the Chiswick flyover, which I believe was set up as a temporary bridge I do not know how many decades ago? Does she therefore share my concern at the talk of a temporary crossing at Hammersmith Bridge and wonder whether that will also be there in 50 years' time?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am sure many noble Lords know and love the Chiswick flyover. A more serious point is that the Government are already investing in a number of bridges in London. We are considering bids from TfL to help with improvements to Kew Bridge, the Croydon flyover and the bridge at Gallows Corner. The Government are investing in bridges in London; we rely on receiving requests for funding in the first place.

Lord Rosser (Lab): What percentage of the cost of repairing Hammersmith Bridge do the Government believe they themselves should bear?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I cannot answer that question, because I have not received a proposal. At the moment, the costs for repairing the bridge are estimated to be £120 million but this is a very early stage of the process. We should recognise that TfL has already stepped up to the plate and committed £25 million to make sure that the early work can start. It is its intention to go to award of contracts for the next stage in the spring.

Lord Watts (Lab): My Lords, the Prime Minister was in charge of this area of responsibility when he was Mayor of London. How much did he put aside for the repair of this bridge?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I am afraid I cannot answer that question because that was many years ago. If I can find out any information, I will write to the noble Lord.

British Citizens: Working Abroad

Question

2.54 pm

Asked by *The Earl of Clancarty*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures they plan to take to protect opportunities to work in Europe for British citizens resident in (1) the United Kingdom, and (2) abroad.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, protecting citizens' rights has been a priority for Her Majesty's Government in our negotiations with the European Union. The withdrawal agreement provides citizens with certainties about their rights, meaning that approximately 1 million UK nationals in the EU can continue to live their lives broadly as they do now. Her Majesty's Government are committed to agreeing a future partnership with the EU by December 2020. The details, including those on mobility, are a matter for negotiation.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, is the Minister aware of the recent survey indicating that thousands of UK jobs in the seasonal tourism sector have disappeared in the last year alone? Much of our trade in services with Europe, including IT and the creative industries, will not be viable unless the disadvantages of leaving the single market—loss of free movement, uncertainties over the A1 certificate, the cost of moving equipment such as musical instruments—are fully addressed. Are the Government working on a solution? Blue cards are not a solution for the many British workers on contracts who are now deeply worried.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I assure the noble Earl that of course we are working in a very pragmatic fashion with our EU partners. The political declaration, as I have already said, includes a commitment to conclude ambitious arrangements for services and investment that go beyond WTO commitments, build

on recent EU free trade agreements and provide new arrangements on key service sectors, including financial services. The noble Earl will also be pleased to know that we have agreed to negotiate visa-free travel for short-term visits and arrangements for the temporary entry and stay of citizens for business purposes in key areas. This will also allow businesses to move their employees and to provide services. We are also considering conditions for entry and stay for purposes including research, study, training and youth exchanges.

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, the Minister talked about British citizens continuing to live their lives “broadly” as they do now, a word which could carry quite a lot of weight. Can he tell us whether the Government are addressing the issue of British residents who reside in one EU country but have been working across borders in several countries? Of course, free movement rights give them that flexibility. One thinks of translators, interpreters, the musicians that the noble Earl mentioned and those in many other professions. Are the Government addressing the challenge they face in continuing to practise their profession without having to get work permits for every country in which they might be called upon to work at short notice?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Baroness will know that we have agreed to protect the rights of EU citizens in the UK and we are working with our EU partners to assure UK nationals’ rights in the EU under the withdrawal agreement. Details along the lines of what the noble Baroness suggested are of course very much in the mix in the discussions we are having with the European Union. Issues of residence, the rights of workers and the issues she raised in the music industry, where people are often self-employed, are very much part of the discussions we will continue to have and will be among the details that emerge from the political declaration, as has already been stated.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, it is obvious that this is quite a complex issue, as we have heard. These are people who have spent many years working in EU countries: 750,000 of our citizens are doing that. How confident is the Minister that we will be able to conclude arrangements covering all these complex issues by December of this year?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, there were many who doubted that the withdrawal agreement could be reopened. It was—a new deal was presented which is making its passage through both Houses of Parliament and we hope to agree the first stage of the withdrawal agreement by the end of this month. Yes, we are confident that we have the resources and the people in place and we will continue to work across government, including consulting with key sectors, to ensure that the arrangements that need to be in place by the end of the year are in place.

Lord Fox (LD): My Lords, the Minister has not mentioned mutual recognition of qualifications. This is a huge issue for people working abroad and, indeed,

for European citizens working here. Where does the responsibility lie within government for securing that mutual recognition? What work is now under way?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: All parts of government are involved in the discussions covering all aspects of our departure from the European Union. The noble Lord is quite right to raise the issue of professional qualifications. EU professionals resident or frontier working in the UK, or vice versa—UK nationals working in the EU—will continue to have their professional qualifications recognised.

NHS: Nurses Question

3 pm

Asked by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

To ask Her Majesty’s Government when they expect to meet the Conservative party manifesto commitment to deliver 50,000 more nurses in the National Health Service.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, we expect to increase nurse numbers by 50,000 by 2025. Eligible preregistration students on courses at English universities from September 2020 will receive additional support of at least £5,000 a year, which they will not need to repay. Additional payments of up to £3,000 will be available for some students in regions or specialisms struggling to recruit and to help students to cover childcare costs. We encourage everyone considering this incredible career to apply before the deadline on 15 January.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister, but the manifesto pledge and what she said today seem to me to have a whiff of fantasy, due to double counting, uncertain finances and a less than precise timetable. Of the 50,000 extra nurses, it turns out that only 30,500 will actually be additional nurses, of whom 12,500 will have to be recruited from other countries. Of the 18,500 that the Government are so magically going to persuade to stay on against the current trends, 12,400 were already pledged in the NHS plan published earlier in the year. It all seems to be on a bit of a wing and a prayer as to whether the Government will get anywhere near a net increase of 50,000. How can the Minister be confident that they are going to succeed when the student nurse attrition rate is at 25% and 14,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nurse courses last year?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: My Lords, first, I thank the NHS staff who have worked so hard over the Christmas and new year period. I point the noble Lord to the recent record; the NHS now has over 20,300 more nurses on our wards than in 2010 and over 52,000 more nurses in training. We have increased our training places by 25% since September 2018 and made available 3,000 more midwifery places

[BARONESS BLACKWOOD OF NORTH OXFORD]

to ensure that we can achieve this outcome. We have put in place several actions on recruitment and retention, because we need to retain our extremely experienced and excellent nurses and to recruit more nurses to support them. That is why we have announced this new package, which will not only increase nurse payment by 12% but provide support for those in training, attracting more nurses in to support those already in place.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, from the point of view of both retention and recruitment of nurses, would my noble friend not think it a good idea to allow student nurses who stay in the profession for a period of time to have their fees written off, given that because of their levels of pay they will not pay back the student loans required for the profession? That would save the taxpayer a good deal of money and encourage people to come into the profession.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I always take very careful note of proposals from my noble friend. At the moment, that is not under consideration, but it will certainly be looked into. As the entry salaries rise, it is more likely that student loans will be repaid, but what is important at this stage is that we attract the most nurses into the profession. At the moment students are able to access student loan funding for maintenance as well as the non-repayable funding from the DHSC, which means that we will meet our target of 50,000 more nurses by 2025, which is what we need to be able to deliver a sustainable NHS.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB): My Lords, could the Minister provide an estimate of the number of people the Government expect to recruit from countries where the nurse-to-population ratio is already inadequate? If this is morally right and what we need to do, how can we ensure that some of our overseas aid budgets through DfID are used to increase nurse training in countries that we will recruit nurses from?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The noble Baroness is very expert in this area. I cannot give her specific numbers on specific recruitment from individual countries; I do not know which specific countries she is asking about. I can tell her that the recruitment of nurses from overseas non-EU territories has increased by 156% in recent years; as the daughter of a South African nurse, I can also tell her that this is a long-term pattern and has been good for the NHS. However, we must also make sure that we invest in many of those nations as we do through the overseas budget, which is part of the department's healthcare priority. I would be happy to write to her with details.

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, many noble Lords will know that 2020 is the Year of the Midwife. I am delighted that the Minister was able to make an announcement on the number of midwives but I want to know by when they would be in post. I also want to know, as I am sure the House does, who is responsible for the delivery of those 50,000 new nurses.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The primary responsibility for their delivery will fall to the Secretary of State and NHS England but, obviously, it falls under the NHS people plan put together by Dido Harding—my noble friend Lady Harding of Winscombe—so it will be delivered through that programme.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, can we turn to the terrible situation facing nurses in Northern Ireland? Currently, there are 2,800 nursing vacancies, nurse pay has fallen by 15% in real terms in recent years, and nurses in Northern Ireland are the lowest paid in the United Kingdom. On 18 December, members of the RCN—the Royal College of Nursing—went on strike. That is absolutely unique. They plan to take further strike action on 8 and 10 January. Does the noble Baroness agree that this crisis cannot wait for the restoration of devolved institutions and that, given that he has the locus and power to do so, the Secretary of State should sort this out?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The noble Baroness raises an important issue. It is under active and serious consideration but, at this point, we are unable to give specific details about it. I will come back to the House on this when I am able to do so.

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the Government on the new funding scheme for those wanting to come into nursing. Can the Minister say a little more about when this funding will be available?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The bursary will be available for new and continuing nursing, midwifery and allied health students for courses from September 2020. As I said, students will be able to access both student loan funding and this additional, non-repayable funding from the Department of Health and Social Care while studying. This means that students will have more cash in their pockets than they ever have before, which should attract them. It also means that we will be able to target funding to areas and specialisms that struggle to recruit, which we believe will definitely improve the sustainability of the nursing workforce and reduce its variability up and down the country.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as chair of the National Mental Capacity Forum. Do the Government recognise that we need to do more than just put more money into nursing for learning difficulties, given that there are now 1,000 fewer such nurses than there were four years ago and given that the mortality and morbidity rate in the population of people with learning difficulties is alarming, in that their life expectancy can be around 10 years shorter than that of the rest of the population? This area needs to be targeted. Given the stresses involved in this type of nursing, it takes more than money to retain people.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: As ever, the noble Baroness raises a serious issue. We have introduced a targeted initiative for students who commence loan-funded postgraduate preregistration nursing courses

particularly for those going on to work in learning disability, mental health and district nursing—to give them a golden hello, as it were. We have also introduced more clinical placements, where students can gain specific professional knowledge and be attracted into those very specialised and important areas of expertise.

Health: Eating Disorders

Question

3.09 pm

Asked by **Baroness Parminter**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking following the reported rise in hospital admissions for eating disorders.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, the latest figures show that young people with an eating disorder are getting more of the support and treatment that they need than ever before. As part of the NHS long-term plan's investment of an extra £2.3 billion a year by 2023-24, eating disorder services are being ramped up across England. This is on top of the £30 million each year announced in 2014, supporting 70 teams delivering care to thousands more young people with eating disorders.

Baroness Parminter (LD): NHS figures show that 19,000 people required hospitalisation for eating disorders in England last year. That figure is more than double what it was a decade ago. With only 649 in-patient beds in the NHS in England to treat people with eating disorders, does the Minister agree that the resources to tackle this worrying mental health crisis are too scarce?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The noble Baroness, I know, has personal expertise in this area, and I thank her for her Question. As she knows, we have taken seriously trying to expand and improve eating disorder services in the country. We have invested the extra £30 million in community care and introduced the new waiting time standard, which we are on target to meet. But she is right to say that we need to improve in-patient care as well, and we are working hard to deliver on that.

Lord Lexden (Con): My Lords, in view of the key role of schools in responding to mental health issues such as eating disorders, what progress have the Government made in giving schools the vital training support that they need in this area?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: My noble friend is right that schools are important if we are to deliver on our commitment to the earlier diagnosis and prevention of mental ill-health, particularly in the area of eating disorders. We are introducing new school and college-based mental health support teams, the first of which are now becoming operational. We are

also piloting four-week waiting times in 12 areas to improve access to children's and young people's specialist mental health services, which link to those schools, and we will evaluate performance on that.

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, can the Minister confirm that in addressing the rise in eating disorders, sufficient consideration will be given to the intersection with the anti-obesity agenda? Measures to tackle childhood obesity such as calorie counting or compensatory exercise are also symptoms of eating disorders, the very behaviours that treatment seeks to address. Many patients report that their illness started as a result of weight-related teasing, healthy eating advice or being praised for dramatic weight loss. Does the Minister agree that the solutions for eating disorders and obesity need to be considered in parallel to avoid the risk of one impacting negatively on the other?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: Obviously we cannot ignore the obesity challenges that we face in this nation, and it is right that we take strong action to address them. But we recognise that this must be done in a sensitive way that also takes into account the potential consequences for those with eating disorders. We must strike a careful balance between informing and educating people about healthier choices and not negatively impacting on those with eating disorders, those in recovery from eating disorders or those who have the potential to develop them.

Lord Winston (Lab): My Lords, the figures are, of course, of great concern but, as so often happens with many pathologies, sometimes the reasons for these sudden or increased rises are due to better diagnosis or increasing diagnosis, and, of course, greater awareness of the problem. Given that, can the noble Baroness say what plans the Government have to ensure that NHSX is fully supported in trying to help us to analyse these data to see just how important investment in this particular condition actually is, and others similarly that are on the rise?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The noble Lord, as ever, is quite right to delve into the detail of the 2017 survey into the mental health of children and young people in England. It found that eating disorders were identified in 0.4% of five to 19 year-olds—the spread was 0.7% of girls and 0.1% of boys—but it rose to 1.6% of girls aged seven to 19. Obviously, we want to understand what this rise in admissions means. There could be a number of reasons, which we hope are linked to earlier and better diagnosis, but of course we need to understand it better. We have a much better understanding of the data through the NHS mental health dashboard, which tracks down to CCG level what is happening with it, but we need to make sure that this work is properly funded and properly tracked in order to lead to better and more effective policies and provision of commissioned services.

Lord Lansley (Con): Does my noble friend recognise that sometimes the point at which young people with severe eating disorders are able to meet the criteria for

[LORD LANSLEY]

admission to an in-patient bed is so severe that some of the potential benefits from an earlier admission are lost? I ask my noble friend to return to the number of in-patient beds. We have a deficiency. What is the Government's estimate of the extent of that deficiency, and what steps are being taken to commission additional in-patient beds?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: We are increasing the number of commissioned in-patient beds up and down the country, but we are doing it in a way that recognises that it is better to have earlier diagnosis—prevention of the need to admit—and ensures that we do not wait until patients are at the stage where they need admission, which is the primary aim. My noble friend is absolutely right that we need to make sure that we have the right balance between those two. At the moment, we are doing a thorough assessment, and I will be happy to write to him on that issue.

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, the Minister has mentioned early diagnosis and treatment, which will help save lives, yet doctors receive less than two hours' training on this topic. What pressure can the Government bring to bear to improve training for this deadliest of mental health illnesses?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: My Lords—*[Interruption.]*

I am getting some help from the other side.

The noble Baroness is quite right on this matter. It is vital that professionals are trained to look out for potential signs. Obviously, with such a deadly mental illness—

I am not sure whether to stop or carry on.

Diagnosing eating disorders is an important area of mental health practice, so Health Education England is taking forward a significant package of work at the moment to review current education and training offered to identify gaps and ensure that not only junior doctors but general practitioners and nurses have the right kind of training.

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, we now come to a number of First Readings. It might be helpful to the House if Members were kind enough to switch off their mobile phones before coming into the Chamber.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.17 pm

A Bill to make provision about the Commonwealth Games that are to be held principally in Birmingham in 2022; and for connected purposes.

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

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to make in relation to marriage and civil partnership in England and Wales provision about divorce, dissolution and separation; and for connected purposes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Keen of Elie, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to create a power of arrest, without warrant, for the purpose of extraditing people for serious offences.

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

Pension Schemes Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to make provision about pension schemes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ashton of Hyde (on behalf of Baroness Stedman-Scott), read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Committee of Selection

Membership Motion

3.19 pm

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

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

Ashton of Hyde, L, Craig of Radley, L, Evans of Bowes Park, B, Judge, L, McAvoy, L, Newby, L, Plant of Highfield, L, Smith of Basildon, B, Stoneham of Droxford, L, Ullswater, V.

Motion agreed.

Queen's Speech Debate (2nd Day)

3.19 pm

*Moved on Thursday 19 December 2019 by
Lord Lamont of Lerwick*

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

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

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, it is a great privilege to open this debate on the humble Address. I am in no doubt as to the many valuable and insightful contributions from your Lordships, and that these will be addressed by my noble friend Lady Goldie with her usual panache and eloquence. We all look forward to the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick. At this stage, I should declare my farming interests as set out in the register.

The general election has transformed the political landscape, and this Government will deliver the change that our country seeks, with vigour and ambition.

Our Diplomatic Service is the envy of the world. At this time of heightened tension in the Middle East, it is clear that we need diplomacy now more than ever. It is a timely reminder of why this Government have committed to expand our diplomatic network, enhance our relationships with our European neighbours and strengthen our global partnerships as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

As we move beyond the EU’s common structures for the first time in over four decades, we have the opportunity to reassess, reshape and refine our strategic approach. That is why we have announced an integrated security, defence and foreign policy review, to ensure that we focus our international efforts to make the most impact and secure the maximum benefit. Whatever the outcome of that review, our diplomatic networks will continue to play a vital role in building and sustaining the United Kingdom’s network of international relationships.

The rules-based international system remains the best framework for defining and upholding acceptable behaviour at a global scale. It is a system that this country helped to build and one that this Government are determined to defend and strengthen. To this end, we will play our part in bolstering the United Nations, NATO, our Five Eyes intelligence alliance, the G20, the G7, the World Trade Organization and the Commonwealth, as current chair-in-office and beyond. We are also committed to strengthening the UK’s role as a global force for good. We are proud to maintain our commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on international development.

We will continue to promote our values of democracy, equality, human rights and the rule of law as we tackle global challenges, including biodiversity loss and climate change, and make the world safer, healthier and more prosperous. We will defend these values robustly, including by protecting freedom of religion or belief and freedom of the media, and by developing a Magnitsky-style sanctions regime. This will prevent those responsible for gross human rights abuses living lavish lifestyles in the United Kingdom or siphoning their money through British banks and British businesses.

We are leading efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict, including hosting an international conference that will focus on strengthening accountability and justice for survivors. We will continue to promote 12 years of quality education for all girls.

We are also leading the fight against malaria and the global response to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are escalating efforts to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children in the developing world by 2030. We will boost our support for developing countries to ensure everyone has access to healthcare. We will invest more in vaccines and research, so that developing countries can benefit from the very best of British and international expertise.

This Government have renewed their commitment to spend at least 2% of our GDP on defence every year of this Parliament and to increase the defence budget by at least 0.5% above inflation every year. The UK has the highest defence expenditure in Europe and is the second-biggest financial contributor to NATO. The Government’s defence spending commitment will ensure that our Armed Forces can help keep the UK safe.

We must ensure that we support those brave men and women who serve or have served, as well as their families. That is why we have laid out the Government’s strong opposition to vexatious litigation and to our service personnel and veterans being subjected to repeated investigations and potential prosecution arising from historical military operations overseas. Veterans rightly expect the Government to pay the closest attention to this issue. We will bring forward comprehensive legislation to address this as soon as possible.

The Government will also further progress proposals to incorporate the Armed Forces covenant into law, to ensure that Armed Forces personnel are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives as a result of their military service. Our objective is to make the United Kingdom the best place in the world for veterans. The *Strategy for our Veterans* sets out an ambitious vision to achieve this by 2028, and the Office for Veterans’ Affairs will take forward the UK Government’s strategy action plan, which is due to be published early this year.

The first priority, as the Prime Minister has recently emphasised, will be to deliver Brexit on 31 January and to seize the opportunities it creates for the United Kingdom as a whole, both on a domestic and international stage. In the general election, the country re-elected the Government with the manifesto commitment to get Brexit done, and to take back control of our laws and money. The European Union (Withdrawal

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

Agreement) Bill will implement in domestic law the withdrawal agreement agreed between the UK and the EU.

We will have this golden opportunity to set our own independent trade policy. Within three years, we aim to cover 80% of our trade with free trade agreements. This will start with the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, all of which will be negotiated alongside a new trade deal with the EU. Our new free trade agreements will be tailored towards the needs of British firms and the British economy. They will give UK businesses enhanced opportunities to expand overseas, while giving consumers here more choice. We will also forge stronger links with the Commonwealth, which boasts some of the most dynamic economies. We will ensure that the agreements we negotiate are in the national interest of the UK. We will settle for nothing less.

Our export strategy will help increase exports as a percentage of GDP, and a new network of up to 10 free ports will help boost growth and create jobs across the whole of the United Kingdom.

We will ensure that the UK trade deals are not only free but fair, especially towards developing nations whose economies could be transformed by access to the UK's markets and expertise. In doing so, we will do more to help countries receiving aid to become economically self-sufficient and to trade their way out of needing aid. In all our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

By retaking our seat as an independent member of the WTO, we will support the WTO's efforts to remove barriers to trade and maintain its role at the heart of the international trading order. We will introduce legislation to support a smooth transition as we leave the EU, providing continuity for businesses and consumers. A new independent trade remedies authority will give UK producers protection against unfair trade practices.

We are fully focused on retaining the UK's position as the number one destination in Europe for foreign direct investment.

The Government are committed to unleashing the potential of the private sector for international development. Through hosting the UK-Africa Investment Summit on 20 January 2020 in London, we will bring together businesses, Governments and international institutions to deepen investment and business ties between the UK and Africa.

We will ensure that animals are recognised in domestic law as sentient beings, and that Ministers of the Crown have regard to the welfare of animals when formulating and implementing government policy. We will also increase sentences for those who perpetrate cruelty on animals.

Through the agriculture Bill, we will support UK farmers, who manage 70% of our land, to improve the environment while they produce more of the high-welfare, high-quality British food that is the backbone of our booming food and drinks sector. A new system of farm payments will reward farmers and land managers for their work delivering public goods.

The fisheries Bill will invigorate our vital coastal communities by taking back control of our waters so that we can manage our marine environments in a sustainable way.

This Government will tackle the two greatest environmental challenges facing the world: climate change and biodiversity loss. The UK has shown that we can grow our economy while reducing our emissions. We are committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. We have decarbonised faster than any other G20 nation since 2000, we are a world leader in offshore wind and there are now nearly 400,000 jobs in low-carbon industries and their supply chains. We are doubling the UK's investment for international climate finance to £11.6 billion over five years. We will help protect 1 billion people from the impact of extreme weather and deploy the new Ayrton Fund to develop affordable and accessible technology to help developing countries reduce emissions and meet climate-change targets.

By embedding environmental ambition at the heart of government policy-making at every level, we will help everyone to tackle the greatest environmental priorities of our time. We will include ambitious legislative measures in our newly strengthened environment Bill to improve air quality, nature recovery, waste and resource efficiency, water resource management in a changing climate, and establish a new, world-leading independent office for environmental protection.

As hosts of COP 26 in Glasgow this November, we will build new international partnerships to set ambitious targets for nature, climate and ocean, and to tackle deforestation and protect vital landscapes and wildlife corridors. I spent a little while over Christmas planting a few trees, though nowhere near as many as our commitment to plant 75,000 acres of new woodland per year across the UK by 2025. We will establish a new £500 million Blue Planet fund to help protect our oceans from plastic pollution, rising sea temperatures and overfishing.

The gracious Speech sets out a clear legislative programme with renewed spirit to prepare this great country for the future; to help us build a stronger, greener and more prosperous Britain and to put a strong United Kingdom front and centre in the world, with the talents and qualities the people of this country possess. I am in no doubt that your Lordships will seek considerable activity with the legislative programme, and I very much hope that that will be the case.

We of this generation face an enormous challenge. I do not deny that dealing with climate change will test us all, but we must all play our part and, as the Defra Minister, I am absolutely determined. Climate change straddles all departments in so many respects. Future generations will look at us and say: "What did you do?" For the future of this country, it is vital that we address these matters.

3.35 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his introduction to this element of the debate on the gracious Speech. Three months ago, the Government said that they would be at the forefront of solving,

"the most complex international security issues"

and “pressing global challenges.” But, as the noble Lord, Lord Kerr of Kinlochard, argued at the time, it is difficult to see the evidence for that. Where have we been in stopping the horrors unfolding in northern Syria, or ending the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Yemen? Where was our voice when Trump wrecked the world's efforts to tackle climate change and nuclear proliferation? Where was our influence when the US launched its recent attack on Baghdad airport? I know that there will be an opportunity during the Ministerial Statement to go into more detail, but we know from Dominic Raab over the weekend that he found out about that attack only as it happened.

The gracious Speech makes the case for a common strategy across development, defence and diplomacy through an integrated policy review. Such an approach is essential for a successful foreign policy. However, I was concerned to see that the lead departments for the review are the FCO, the MoD and the Cabinet Office—but not DfID. DfID is the leading aid agency, which is vital to Britain's soft power, security and trading relationships, just as much as it is a force for ending global poverty. That must be reflected throughout this review. I also saw on Twitter a report that the review will not be used to fold the Department for International Development into the FCO. I hope that the Minister will give us a categorical assurance today that that is the case and that DfID will continue as a stand-alone department.

I welcome the pledge to meet our 0.7% target, but any spending that is counted towards that sum must truly contribute to sustainable development. I heard what the Minister said about ensuring that countries become self-sufficient—who would disagree with that? Obviously, private investment and countries developing their own economies and tax revenues are vital to that. No one can dispute that. We all want to work towards a world where each state can be self-sufficient and not in need of aid. That also requires help building capability, giving assistance and ensuring that there is no corruption, giving countries the tools to do the job as well as the means to develop their economy. But I am concerned that we do not use ODA funds for private development. We must ensure that the principle of ODA, which we agree internationally, is used for that purpose. Therefore, any moves on this part should be fully transparent and accountable.

The commitments on ending all preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children by 2030 and the eradication of Ebola and malaria are welcome. So too is the action to help provide 12 years of quality education for all girls by 2030. Labour supports such commitments. However, they must be considered as part of a wider commitment to the sustainable development goals, on which we are failing domestically. In the UK, more than 500,000 children are now in supersized classes, which shows a lack of commitment to goal 4 on quality education.

I take this opportunity to repeat my disappointment that the Government have failed to use this opportunity to signal a new approach to the sustainable development goals by creating a policy unit in No. 10 dedicated to them, with a Cabinet Minister responsible for co-ordination across Whitehall. That is what the SDGs are about: ensuring that we are all responsible for delivering on them and that we are all equally committed to them.

Last October, I urged the Government to deliver on their remaining 2013 nutrition for growth commitments and to take full advantage of this year's Tokyo summit. It was reassuring to hear the Minister—the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg—talk of the Government's work with the Japanese Government to ensure a successful summit. I urge the Government to make a strong and early pledge, ideally at the July springboard event—I hope the Minister will be able to give us some hope—and to ask for the highest possible level of government attendance at the event. Nutrition is not only important in its own right, it unlocks the impact of DfID's other interventions; for example, in health, education and economic development. Its importance should be reflected in this Government's approach to the Tokyo summit.

I note what the Minister said on defence. The commitment on defence spending is certainly welcome, but since 2010 successive Conservative Prime Ministers have cut our defence capability, undermining our ability to keep to our international commitments and obligations. I am sure my noble friend Lord West will address how we have to catch up from the cuts we have suffered since 2010. Any review of the MoD procurement process should be used to boost the UK economy. We want boats built here and certainly as soon as possible—my noble friend has corrected me: I should have said “ships”. That is what we want: a boost to the British economy in determining good value.

There should be increased oversight of and transparency in the MoD's use of technology and autonomous weapons. I know the human rights committee has been concerned about some of these issues and I hope the Minister will be able to address them.

I think that across the House we are concerned to ensure that the Armed Forces covenant is not just words but is deeds and actions and that we honour the commitment in realistic terms, not just make promises. We will certainly want to see those commitments and to scrutinise them as they develop over this Parliament.

The commitment to promote our values and the focus on human rights should be reflected in a review of the Government's regime for arms exports. Last September I mentioned the failure properly to uphold international law on arms sales to Saudi Arabia. I hope the Minister will be able to give clear assurances that there will not be ongoing breaches. The Minister mentioned Magnitsky-style measures. This House, and this side of the House, were very keen to ensure they were included in the sanctions regime. Will the Government consider using those measures against Saudi Arabia for its human rights violations, which are extremely numerous and shocking in detail?

With an independent sanctions regime, the Government must ensure that any decision to impose new sanctions or revoke existing ones is subject to adequate parliamentary scrutiny and periodic review. In this context, I heard what the Minister said but I hope—this is vital—that the FCO will receive the resources and capability it needs to do that.

I am sure that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, will refer to this, but the Foreign Secretary said not so long ago that he would “relish, not shrink from” our global duty to bring the perpetrators of injustice and war crimes to account. In this Queen's Speech, I had hoped

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

to see specific proposals on how we would achieve that, and I hope that the Minister will respond, because the current arrangements have clearly not been effective. We still see people who have committed the most horrendous crimes not being held to account. If we are to stop these abuses, we have to ensure that people know that in the end they will be caught and dealt with.

I heard what the Minister said about, and I welcome the commitment on, our lead in creating a sustainable planet, but this gracious Speech contains nothing of substance to deal with the colossal challenge of the climate and environmental emergency. The Government's target date of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 is too late. In any case, at the current rate of progress we will not reach net-zero emissions until 2099. The expected reintroduction of the environment Bill hints at a bold agenda, including through a framework for setting legally binding targets on air, nature, water and waste, yet the Bill still falls short, with current standards at risk and existing protections set to be weaker. It should include a legally binding commitment to maintain existing standards and prevent backsliding on environmental standards after Brexit. We need to ensure that the office for environmental protection is genuinely independent of government and equipped with the necessary resources and powers to hold government and public authorities to account.

My noble friend Lord Stevenson will be winding up for the Opposition and will focus on trade. However, in conclusion, I stress that, although trade deals obviously provide huge opportunities, they will certainly be very difficult to negotiate in the timeframe that the Minister has alluded to, and those opportunities should not be at the cost of social and environmental standards. I heard what the Minister said about environmental standards but there are other standards that we should be concerned about—particularly those relating to the change in the supply of labour and the exploitation of workers and children. We should not allow trade agreements to override those concerns. We must address them and ensure that they are included, and to do that we must have proper parliamentary scrutiny.

3.48 pm

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, the title of this debate must have been designed as an illustration of the Prime Minister's erroneous claim that Brexit is done, since neither Brexit nor the European Union feature in it. Are we supposed to regard the EU already as part of "foreign affairs"?

I have to recognise the reality that Brexit is happening, although I cannot and will not accept it. I think it is a terrible mistake. I will never be reconciled to it; I hope that future generations will take the UK back into the EU—not least when they find that ending free movement not only destabilises and harms EU and EEA citizens but rips from British citizens the opportunity that their parents and grandparents have enjoyed to live, work and retire on the continent.

My colleague in the other place, Wera Hobhouse, put it very well in the Second Reading debate on the withdrawal agreement Bill, on 20 December, when she stressed that her,

"passionate belief that the UK is better off as a proud member inside the EU, rather than as an irrelevant outsider, has not melted away overnight."

She went on to describe the withdrawal agreement as,

"damaging to our economy, our security, our international reputation and our ability to tackle the global climate emergency ... it will put a border in the Irish sea and threaten our family of nations. Most of all, we will lose something profoundly British: being international, and leading in the continuous fight for liberal values, human rights and a rules-based international order. We Liberal Democrats will always fight for that."—[*Official Report*; Commons, 20/12/19; col. 177.]

We have seen a major illustration in recent days of the challenges Wera Hobhouse enumerated in the crisis over Iran, which also encapsulates the warning of my leader, my noble friend Lord Newby, in his response to the Queen's Speech on 18 December, that, "the aspiration of having your cake and eating it is about to be dashed."—[*Official Report*; 18/12/19; col. 21.]

But cakeism is exactly what the Prime Minister tried to continue to enjoy in the several days that it took him to come home from his luxury beach holiday in Mustique and address the Iran crisis. The killing of Qasem Soleimani has raised tensions throughout the Middle East while the Prime Minister stayed in the Caribbean, took three days to make an official response and now, I understand, will not be updating MPs in the emergency debate.

Lord Marlesford (Con): My Lords, I think the whole the House will regard those comments as unworthy of a great political party and quite inappropriate when we are discussing serious things today.

Baroness Ludford: I thank the noble Lord for that intervention, with which I profoundly disagree. Frankly, there is a crisis over President Trump's impetuous decision to assassinate Mr Soleimani, as unpleasant a character as he certainly was. It would have behoved the Prime Minister to be rather more visible sooner.

Apart from all the other potential threats, the crisis may well endanger further the situation of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other Britons in Iran. What update can the Government give us in that regard? I heard Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat, the outgoing—and hoping to be incoming—chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, say on "World at One" that the crisis might have a silver lining in allowing a reset of relations with Iran. He may be among few in thinking that there will be any kind of silver lining.

Mr Johnson has tried to bridge supporting the so-called right of the United States to defend itself—a doubtful justification which appears to have no support in international law—and aligning with his European partners to call on both sides not to escalate into a devastating cycle of violence. There is confusion as well as recklessness in Washington, with President's Trump's decision on the assassination having apparently been made on the spur of the moment without any strategic plan. Apparently, the letter announcing the withdrawal of US forces sent by the US military in Iraq to the Iraqi Government was issued in error and US forces are not withdrawing. What is the situation with UK forces?

Instead of being a bridge, the Prime Minister is falling into the gap. Were Iran to respond forcefully, how would the Prime Minister choose between the more aggressive US approach and the more conciliatory EU line? When EU Foreign Ministers meet on Friday, what will Mr Raab say? Will this, by the way, be one of the last EU Council meetings a UK Foreign Minister attends or will Mr Raab attend throughout this year?

The Minister talked of strengthening global relationships but the Iran situation highlights the story and tragedy of Brexit: instead of enjoying being part of an influential organisation, the EU, we will be required to tag along with Trump and his crazy schemes as the price of a trade deal. As the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, who I do not think is in his place—oh, yes he is—put it last night on “Newsnight”, the UK’s position is uncomfortable since President Trump will demand loyalty on Iran, Huawei and other issues as the price of a UK trade deal for the UK. He tweeted:

“I’m afraid that’s going to be one of the realities of post-Brexit Britain, constantly having to weigh our need for trade deals against foreign policy objectives.”

How and on what criteria will the Government resolve that dilemma? Another expert commented that the crisis between the US and Iran highlights how much of a lose-lose situation Brexit is in terms of geopolitical influence, both for the UK and for the EU 27.

On the economy, some Brexiters have made much of a *Financial Times* editorial last week about how the UK economy could thrive after Brexit. The editorial read rather as if it were drafted by a committee, or at least two people, but it had one striking conclusion:

“The UK economy will survive”.

If that is the benchmark for sunny uplands and all the amazing prospects that we are supposed to have, it is not much of an endorsement of Brexit.

Mr Johnson intends to tear us away from the EU single market and tie us to US standards and trade intentions, which many of the public are rightly wary of, from food hygiene to designs on the NHS. Even if a deal is reached, with Mr Johnson’s risky refusal to contemplate an extension to the negotiations very unwisely being written into the draft legislation, all that we are going to get, even with success, is a Canada-style trade agreement with, as my noble friend Lord Newby said in December, free trade in goods, where we have a deficit, but no equivalent deal on services, where we have a surplus. Indeed, services represent 80% of our economy. What about industries, such as the automotive industry, that rely on a long uninterrupted supply chain and on being part of a customs union with common rules of origin? What are their prospects under the Government’s intentions?

On fisheries, the Conservative manifesto promised that the UK would control its fishing waters, and the Minister repeated the pledge to take back control. That promise will definitely be broken if there is to be any prospect of the 80% of our catch that goes to the EU getting into its primary market on the continent without tariff and administrative hurdles.

The withdrawal agreement Bill includes a clause specifically about parliamentary sovereignty, stating:

“It is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom is sovereign”

and that nothing in the Act derogates from that sovereignty. Not only does that contradict other clauses in the withdrawal agreement Bill and the withdrawal agreement itself since we are going to be a rule-taker—or, if you like, a vassal state—for at least a year, and for some aspects way beyond that, but it is of doubtful legal significance. Mike Gordon, professor of constitutional law at the University of Liverpool, has said that, “it is difficult to see that it has any practical effect in terms of diminishing the actual legal status of the obligations flowing from the Withdrawal Agreement in domestic law.”

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): Given the disastrous performance of the noble Baroness’s party at the general election and the loss of its leader, does she not think that instead of just repeating the same carping criticisms, she and her party should get on board and make a success of Brexit?

Baroness Ludford: We will do our very best to make it the least worst Brexit, but the fact is that what the Government have already said and put in the draft Bill is making that prospect extremely difficult, on top of Brexit itself.

As I said, there is a declaratory clause about parliamentary sovereignty. That is then completely undermined by the removal of the clauses that were in the October version of the Bill which were going to give MPs a veto over an extension and control over negotiations on future relations. It seems contradictory, if not hypocritical, to declare parliamentary sovereignty and then take away its substance.

We also know that the Prime Minister tried to claim black was white when he said there would be no checks on goods going between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. All we had to do was read the Government’s own impact assessment which said that those moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will be required to complete both import declarations and entry summary declarations, therefore completely contradicting what he tried to claim. The Government need to come completely clean on that.

Many people are already worried about Prime Minister Johnson being tied to the coat-tails of an erratic and unpredictable President Trump, but there was a curious speech a few weeks ago from No. 10 adviser Tim Montgomerie, which has further set alarm bells ringing. He said that the UK would forge a special relationship with Viktor Orban. He praised the “interesting early thinking” on “the limits of liberalism” of Mr Orban, who is of course a notorious authoritarian. Brexit is set to tear us away from our pole position as a leading member of the liberal, democratic EU into alliances with dodgy leaders across the world, because we are desperate for trade sweeteners. I will never, ever regard that as a good bargain.

Finally, the only wry amusement that might emerge from the situation will be watching the tensions between the little England nationalists who want a nostalgic return to the 1950s, such as Charles Moore, who wants to go back to imperial measurements, the creative destruction of Mr Cummings, as he recruits weirdos and misfits to Whitehall, and the global, buccaneering Singapore-on-Thames that the hedge fund backers of Mr Johnson desire. It will be funny, if terribly sad.

Middle East: Security Update

Statement

4.01 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): With the leave of the House, I will now repeat a Statement given in another place this afternoon by my right honourable friend the Defence Secretary. The Statement is as follows:

“With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a Statement on the security situation in the Middle East. I have deep regard for the nation of Iran and I chaired the Iran APPG for eight years in the House before joining the Government. It is a wonderful place with a dynamic population. The world owes a great deal to its culture and its history.

However, in recent times, Iran has felt that its intentions are best served through the nefarious use of proxies and the use of subversion as a foreign policy tool. It has provided practical military support to the murderous Assad regime in Syria, stoked conflict in Yemen, armed militia groups in Iraq and repeatedly harassed international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. It has also shown a total disregard for human rights, holding dual nationals in prison and causing unimaginable suffering to not just those in jail but their families at home. Such behaviour does nothing to enhance Iran’s reputation with its neighbours and has had a seriously destabilising impact in the region.

One of the foremost architects of Iran’s malign activity was the Quds force of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps. One of its commanders and its leading enabler was General Qasem Soleimani who, on 2 January, was killed by a US drone strike. General Soleimani was no friend of the UK or our allies in the region. He was not an advocate of a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. His clandestine operations saw him supply weaponry to proxy forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He encouraged proxies to develop weapons such as improvised explosive devices that killed and maimed UK soldiers and other western forces. Nor should we forget how he fomented instability in places such as Basra where British forces were stationed. The United States Government have asserted that Soleimani organised the strikes on 27 December by militia group Kata’ib Hezbollah which targeted a US military base in Kirkuk, Iraq, and killed a US civilian contractor. The US is confident that Soleimani came to Baghdad to co-ordinate imminent attacks on American diplomats and military personnel.

The UK will always defend the right of countries to defend themselves. The House will want to know that, since October 2019, coalition bases, which contain both US and UK personnel, and the Baghdad International Zone have been attacked 14 times. One attack on the K1 base involved 32 rockets. Our challenge now, however, is to deal with the situations we find ourselves in. The US has consistently shown restraint, even when its right to self-defence was well established. Since the early hours of Friday morning, the Government have responded to these events. Further conflict is in no one’s interests. The only beneficiaries would be terrorists and extremists seeking to use chaos as a

cover to advance their abhorrent objectives, so we are urging all people—all parties—to de-escalate as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the safety and security of British citizens and our interests in the region are of paramount concern. The FCO has strengthened its travel advice to both Iran and Iraq, and will keep it under constant review. We urge British nationals in the region or those intending to travel to regularly check the GOV.UK website for further updates. We have taken other urgent measures to protect British nationals and interests. The Department for Transport is reviewing the threat state and advice to Red Ensign shipping on a daily basis, supported by the MoD. We will issue guidance imminently. At the same time, Defence is changing the readiness of our forces, including having helicopters and ships on standby to assist if the need arises. To ensure the safety and security of our personnel, we have also relocated non-essential personnel from Baghdad to Taji. Coalition forces in Iraq, including British forces, have suspended all training activities and, as part of prudent planning, a small team has been sent to the region to provide additional situational awareness and contingency planning assistance.

On 5 January, Iraq’s Council of Representatives voted to end permissions for coalition activities in Iraq. As the vote is only one part of the process, we are discussing the implications with our Iraqi interlocutors. Today I simply remind this House that the coalition is in Iraq, at the request of the Iraqi Government, to help protect Iraqis and others against the very real threat of Daesh. Our commitment to Iraq’s stability and sovereignty is unwavering and we urge the Iraqi Government to ensure that the coalition is able to continue our vital work countering this shared threat.

The main focus of the UK Government is to de-escalate this issue. None of us wants conflict. None of us wants our citizens, our friends and our allies to be put at risk. My right honourable friend the Prime Minister, from the outset, has spoken with President Trump, President Macron, Chancellor Merkel and President Erdoğan, and will continue to engage all leaders. The Foreign Secretary and I have been talking to our counterparts and only this morning I met His Royal Highness the Saudi Vice-Minister for Defence; in tandem, we are working with the E3 to reboot the JCPOA, the nuclear deal which we believe is a vital step to achieving a more stable Iran. In the coming days, we will be doing all we can to encourage Iran to take a different path. No one should be under any illusion that, long before the death of General Soleimani, Iran had stepped up its destabilising activity in the region. Whether it was targeting dissidents in Europe or hijacking civilian ships, this aggressive behaviour was never going to go unchallenged. Her Majesty’s Government urge Iran to return to the normal behaviour of the country it aspires to be and to resist the urge to retaliate.”

4.08 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. Each actor engaged in this tension has, as the Minister said, a shared ambition to avoid conflict at all costs. It is that objective which should be our immediate focus. I am

pleased that the Prime Minister has sought to reflect this, and I urge the Government to reiterate the importance of restraint in all diplomatic communications.

Our focus must be on how we can restore relations in the coming weeks. In doing so, we must encourage all leaders to interact through international institutions and use these as our primary mechanism for defusing the situation.

The immediate priority should be restoring an element of calm between Iran and the US in the interests of global stability. The UK can play a part by distancing itself from President Trump's unhelpful threats relating to the targeting of cultural sites, which of course is in breach of international law, and making it clear to Tehran that President Trump's operation in Baghdad last week was unilateral and we had no part in planning or developing it.

The unpredictable nature of present events creates danger in itself, and the UK can help to avert this by affirming our commitment to the United Nations as a means of peace and exploring options available there to find a solution. Although this is primarily a tension involving Iran and our allies across the Atlantic, if it should escalate, it could impact on all our lives. Of course, in the interests of our own national security, the UK must remain fully engaged with our allies in NATO and in constant communication. I know that noble Lords will be aware of the announcement made yesterday by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg relating to the suspension of training operations in Iraq. It is in the interests of all involved that such operations can restart as soon as possible, and the affirmation to this effect by Stoltenberg yesterday should be welcomed. I hope that the Minister will detail what steps are being taken by the UK and our NATO allies to enable this.

It is imperative that the UK can maintain a trusting relationship with the Government and the people of Iraq, not only for the sake of immediate global and regional stability but to enable us to ensure that the global coalition continues to defeat Daesh. The decision of the Iraqi Parliament to pass a resolution potentially leading to the departure of UK troops must be respected, and we must make it clear that we understand the sovereignty of the state of Iraq. However, in doing so, we must demonstrate the value that British troops can bring to the fight against such evil and ask the Parliament to reconsider. I heard what the Minister said about a process and our commitment to work with the Government of Iraq, but we must also make the case for our engagement and not simply demand it from the Government. We should take heed of the resolution as a warning that the UK's presence is granted and not given, but the UK must now move to assure the Government of Iraq that continued operations are to the benefit of both partners as well as of global security. In the meantime, the Government must evaluate whether existing UK personnel are safe and take steps to protect them. I note what the Minister said about the relocation of non-essential staff, but can he explain to the House what steps the Government are taking to ensure that all personnel in Iraq are secure as possible?

The coming weeks will be crucial for global security. Amid the hyperbole, there is a vacuum for a voice to promote restraint and defend international law and

institutions. It is the UK that should be that voice; it should be the UK that advocates reason and calm. I hope that the Minister can assure the House that the Government will engage with Parliament in the coming days and weeks as the situation develops. I hope that there will be a Statement following the meeting of the National Security Council and that the Minister will give the commitment that we are engaged in this process.

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I too thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. This is an exceptionally dangerous situation. Soleimani clearly had a terrible reputation. He had blood on his hands and had played a key part in destabilising the region. The Iranian regime has much to answer for. However, Trump's action has destabilised a tinderbox region even further. What do the Government understand to be the legal basis—in international law, not US domestic law, as the Foreign Secretary mentioned on Sunday—for this drone strike? Are there any circumstances in which the UK considers it legal to use drones to assassinate a perceived threat? The Statement says that the US “asserted” and “is confident” of its position. That is very interesting language. Does the UK share these views, and does it have evidence for that?

The European route has been to seek to bring Iran in, with engagement through the JCPOA. Trump's actions may have finally destroyed that. The Statement mentions rebooting the JCPOA. How is this to be done? This is the first major test of the Government's new foreign policy, which is to remove us from the European Union and to draw closer to the US. The Statement says:

“Our challenge now ... is to deal with the situation we find ourselves in.”

That does not sound like we are leading or in control.

Given that the UK is closely allied to the US in Iraq and the Gulf, what explanation has the US given for not informing the UK? Is it the case that they informed only Israel, even though other countries might also be affected? What evidence is there that the US thought through the short, medium and long-term consequences of its actions? Does the UK agree?

Does the Minister agree that this action benefits the hardliners in Iran and Iraq and that the protesters in both those countries, who were seeking a less corrupt, less sectarian way forward, will now have their voices drowned out?

Does the Minister agree that dual nationals, such as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, are now in even more difficult circumstances? What comfort can the Government give to her and her family, as well as to our own troops and those working in the region?

The UK and the US base their operations against Daesh, and in relation to Syria, from Iraq. The Government clearly recognise the risk here. What happens if the Iraqi Government decide to implement the parliament's decision and ask foreign forces to leave? What does this mean for the battle against Daesh?

Some 30% of the world's oil supply goes through the Strait of Hormuz, and I note what the Statement says. However, does the Minister think that shipping can be adequately protected, as he describes? What alternative

[BARONESS NORTHOVER]

routes are there? He will have seen how targeted the attacks on Saudi Aramco were. What is the result of discussions held with the GCC countries about scaling this crisis down? Iran has significant cyber capabilities and has tested these out in attacks on western countries. Is the Minister aware of the Iranian-linked attempt on Parliament, shortly after the US attack?

President Trump has stated that the US has identified 52 sites in Iran to target in the event of Iranian retaliation. Does the UK know what they are? Is the US discussing this with us? Have we sought reassurance that no Iranian cultural sites will be targeted in any future action?

This is a very dangerous moment, when the dangers of the Trump presidency when dealing with the Middle East tinderbox are clear for all to see. I look forward to comprehensive answers from the Minister, who I know fully understands the huge risks that we all now face.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for their comments and contributions, particularly the support and words of the noble Lord. They both know—as I am sure all noble Lords do—the importance of restraint and ensuring that we de-escalate this crisis. I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Collins, that, as was said in the Statement and made clear in statements by my right honourable friends the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence, our priority is ensuring that we call on all sides for restraint at this important time.

On ensuring that all multilateral international organisations play a role, when I was preparing to deliver the Statement I noted the statements that were made by the Secretary-Generals of NATO and the United Nations. The noble Baroness referred to the importance of our partners in the Middle East. It is important to stress the need for restraint on all sides: she will have noticed that we continue to work closely with our European partners in the E3 statement that was issued after the meeting. As I said in the Statement, the Prime Minister has spoken to various leaders around the world who are directly involved, including the President of the US and the Iraqi Prime Minister.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, mentioned the important role that the United Kingdom has played and continues to play in bringing stability to Iraq and the wider region. When I visited Iraq 18 months or so ago, I saw the important role the UK was playing in this, as well as the importance of the various UN missions. I am assured that, thus far, the important work of UNITAD continues. This is important in ensuring that we bring to justice those who have committed heinous crimes during the Iraq conflict.

The noble Lord asked about other partners. As noble Lords will know, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has travelled to Brussels and intends to travel to the US later this week. We are keeping directly engaged with the US and other key partners on these issues. He raised the issue of NATO. While it makes its own assessment, as a key player in NATO we will continue to liaise with all NATO partners.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, raised the importance of safety and security of personnel. I have detailed, to the extent I can, some of the changes we have effected on the ground. Our embassies in Tehran and Baghdad remain open; however, we have taken all necessary steps to ensure the security of our personnel operating in those countries. He asked me to keep the House updated, and I shall seek to do so as we move forward. The important point to emphasise here—I totally agree with the noble Lord—is the importance of de-escalation and bringing down tensions.

I say to the noble Baroness, who asked about the JCPOA, that we have reiterated in our various exchanges, including with Foreign Minister Zarif, the importance of returning to the table on the JCPOA. She will be aware that, before the death of General Soleimani, the Iranians had already increased their non-co-operation: their level of co-operation on the JCPOA had decreased, but we have again stressed the importance of keeping that particular diplomatic door very much open.

The noble Baroness asked about our contacts with our European partners in a post-Brexit Britain. She will be reassured by the fact that we have shown consistency with our previous approach and have worked with E3 partners, namely Germany and France, in issuing statements, and by the fact that my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary is visiting Brussels today. That underlines again the importance of that relationship.

The noble Baroness raised concerns, which I share, about the increased influence of hardliners in Iran, as well as the safety and security of dual nationals, which has been a cause of understandable concern in your Lordships' House. I share her concerns: that is why, to quote the noble Lord, Lord Collins, we are seeking to play a primary and key role in ensuring de-escalation at this crucial stage.

The noble Baroness specifically asked about security for our shipping. I assure her that we have assets in place. I gave a sense or a flavour of the number of assets we have by which we seek to continue to protect the Strait of Hormuz; of course, we are keeping that situation under review.

The issue of cultural sites was raised by both the noble Lord and the noble Baroness. I think we have had a clarification from the US Defense Secretary on this issue, and I am sure that that statement provides reassurance to noble Lords in that respect.

On international co-operation with Arab partners, I again stress that we have seen statements from various Arab leaders, including organisations within the Arab world, which reflect the importance of de-escalation and bringing greater calm to the region.

If there are other specific questions which I have not answered, I will pick up on them and respond to the noble Baroness and the noble Lord in writing.

4.25 pm

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, would the Minister agree that the “Thought for the Day” by the Bishop of Loughborough this morning on BBC Radio 4, available on the Sounds app, shone an important light on this matter? She came to this country as an Iranian refugee following the murder of her brother,

and what she was pointing to was that in the context of the immediate crisis we must not lose sight of the fact that Iran has a very rich and long history as a seat of civilisation, and that we should not tar the entire country and culture with one brush.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I thank the right reverend Prelate for his intervention. He quoted the Bishop of Loughborough, and I agree with her. In the Statement, I made the point about the importance of Iran's rich cultural history. Indeed, I know for a fact that my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Defence has also emphasised this during various visits. As said in the Statement, he headed up the APPG on Iran. While we are looking at this crisis in terms of de-escalation, I am sure it is also not lost, as we reflect on the sombre nature of the exchanges we are having, that today we also learned—and our ambassador has conveyed condolences over this—that during the funeral procession for General Soleimani over 40 people were crushed in the stampede today. We should not forget the human element in these conflicts. For your Lordships' information, Her Majesty's ambassador has expressed his condolences to all the families impacted.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick (Con): My Lords, I refer to my entry in the register of Members' interests as the unremunerated chairman of the British Iranian Chamber of Commerce.

I agree with the noble Lord that General Soleimani was obviously no angel and no friend to Britain, although it is worth recalling that he twice fought on the side of the Americans against a common enemy, until America decided that it did not want him. Is not the only way of judging this act to judge whether it makes the world a safer or a more dangerous place? Is it not the case, as the Minister has been hinting, that if the US is forced to withdraw troops from Iraq then the fight against ISIS will be much weakened and ISIS may revive? Is it not also the case that, if Iran sees itself as having been backed into a corner and able to reply only with commensurate action, then the United States is likely to take further action, deterrents will have totally failed and the cycle of violence will be reinforced? Lastly, has not this action very largely united an Iranian population who not so long ago were protesting and rioting against their Government? Can the Minister convince us that there is an American strategy here, or is this just the law of the jungle?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I am not here to answer on behalf of the US Administration. What I can do is talk of the responses of Her Majesty's Government to the situation on the ground. I agree with the sentiments of my noble friend, who obviously has deep insight into Iran, about the actions we have seen—including the killing of General Soleimani. It is for that reason that we have stressed, and continue to stress, the importance of de-escalating and reducing tensions in this area. He makes the point—I, he and all noble Lords have witnessed the scenes from Iran—that the hardliners in Iran have clearly been given a stronger voice. However, as I said in the Statement and as my noble friend acknowledged, Soleimani was no friend of the West.

We must now deal with the situation in front of us. Therefore, it is important that the UK uses its influence with our partners in Europe through the E3, as I have already said. We are working with the United States and updating regularly; as I have said, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary is travelling to the US and we will seek to keep the House advised of future developments. However, I am sure my noble friend agrees with me that it is now important to call for not just calm but de-escalation from all sides.

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, no one here mourns the death of such a man of blood. It is understandable that the Foreign Secretary called for restraint and de-escalation, but does the Minister agree that, in situations such as this, it is often helpful to try to imagine what would happen if the reverse were true? For example, if a US Vice-President or Secretary of State were assassinated by an Iranian or an Iranian proxy in the Middle East, would we call for restraint?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the noble Lord on the importance of restraint. At this time and with the sensitive nature of what is in front of us, it would certainly be inappropriate for me to speculate on situations. I stress again the importance of de-escalation and of keeping diplomatic channels open at all levels.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, will the Minister turn his attention for a moment to northern Iraq and Kurdistan, which I visited last month? In particular, is he aware that reactivated ISIS cells killed more than 30 Peshmerga soldiers during the course of December and that they were simultaneously fighting Iranian-backed proxies—Shabak groups armed by Iran—in Nineveh? Given that the vulnerable minorities they have been protecting, including people such as the Yazidis, are facing further genocide, can the Minister say what we can do to work with the Kurdish regional Government to give them reasonable protection and to do what the noble Lord, Lord Collins, said earlier: bring to justice those responsible for these appalling crimes against humanity and genocide, who believe that they can continue to act in the way they have done with impunity because we are incapable of upholding international law, which is why we descend into cycles of assassination and revenge?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, first, I thank the noble Lord for keeping me updated on various issues during the Christmas break. I expected nothing less in terms of the questions he asked, and I look forward to our more detailed sit-down to discuss some of the issues he has raised.

The noble Lord is quite right to raise the important issue of the situation in northern Syria. He also mentioned the KRI region. First, I will reflect Foreign Office advice. When it comes to the KRI, we are saying that non-essential travel should not be taken up, but, if travel is essential, stability continues to prevail in the KRI and we continue to offer support.

The noble Lord knows the importance of bringing the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. Therefore, during conversations between my right honourable

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

friend the Prime Minister and the Iraqi Prime Minister, we emphasised again that, while we respect the Iraqi Parliament's decision, we want to ensure both that there is no withdrawal of either US or UK troops, as limited as UK troop numbers are, and that, in a wider respect, the positive impact on the ground of the measures we have taken—in beginning to see accountability and justice for the victims of crimes, particularly those committed by Daesh—is not lost because of these particular actions. I assure noble Lords that we are doing all we can through all necessary channels to keep that very much on the table.

Viscount Hailsham (Con): My Lords, my noble friend will know that President Trump and his Secretary of State, Mr Pompeo, justified the drone attack by reference to the principle of self-defence in international law. Will my noble friend tell the House whether the Government have seen any material that justifies that assertion? Furthermore, does my noble friend agree that, if Mr Trump or the American Government were deliberately to use disproportionate force—or deliberately target sites of cultural importance, for that matter—they would be in clear breach of international law?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, on the second point made by my noble friend, again I am sure that he has seen the statement made, I believe, yesterday by Secretary of State Pompeo in which he emphasised how important it was that the actions of the US will adhere to international law. On the issue of taking action in self-defence, as I have said, this was a matter very much for the US and I am not going to second guess from the Dispatch Box that assessment. However, it is certainly our view that, while we do not doubt that there were plans for imminent attacks on American diplomats and military personnel, I should reiterate that, rather than speculate about what has happened, our focus should be on seeking to ensure that we de-escalate at this time.

Lord Hain (Lab): My Lords, does the Minister agree that, as a result of this reckless unilateralist act by President Trump, Iranian and Russian influence in the region is likely to increase—and what does that do for British influence?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As regards Iranian influence, we have sought to keep our diplomatic channels open and to engage with the Iranian Administration. It is important to ensure, in the situation we are facing, that extremist and terrorist elements in the wider region do not gain greater momentum—that must be the primary concern at this time—and that the alliances that have been forged to date continue to have an effect on the ground. As I saw for myself on my visit to Iraq, there are real and tangible positive measures and steps that have been taken, and achievements on the ground. I hope that those are not lost, and therefore we will continue to engage proactively to ensure that the situation in Iraq does not descend into further turmoil. It is important that we de-escalate, which is why we have called for all sides to look at any further action they may take, because any further

action that increases tensions in Iraq will lead only to the very forces mentioned by the noble Lord gaining greater ground—and none of us desires that.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, so far we have been discussing this issue in purely western terms. Does my noble friend agree that in fact the rising powers of Asia have enormous and growing interests and influence in the region? Can he reassure us that, besides consulting those in Washington who have perpetrated this act and besides him visiting Brussels, our Foreign Office officials and his colleagues will be in touch with the real powers in Asia whose interests, as I say, are directly affected by what is happening in Iran and who have a major part to play?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Let me assure my noble friend, who we all know from his time as a Foreign Office Minister, that we are all engaging with key partners to provide reassurance. For example, in my conversations earlier today I spoke directly to the Afghani Foreign Minister. As I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister has also spoken to President Erdoğan, because obviously Turkey is a real influence in the region. So the short answer is that, yes, we will continue to engage with those who are directly engaged in the conflict, as well as with our wider partners.

Lord Dear (CB): My Lords, it is of course understandable and quite correct that we should be very concerned about the current state of affairs in that part of the world. However, does the Minister agree, first, that in this fractured and potentially very dangerous situation, one of the few bright and positive lights shining in that area is our relationship with the state of Oman—a country I know well both socially and as an official representing this House? It is a long-standing relationship which goes back more than 200 years. Secondly, does he agree that we should wish His Majesty Sultan Qaboos a speedy return to good health?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the noble Lord and I am sure that other noble Lords will join with me in wishing the Sultan a speedy recovery. Oman has played a key role in the wider region, as we have seen during the Yemen conflict, and we hope that it will continue to do so. It has also been a constructive partner in bringing together different sides after differences arose between Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia within the GCC.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, clearly, the events of the last few days will strike terror into the hearts of those hundreds of thousands of Iraqis still displaced as a result of the events in Iraq and Syria over the past 10 to 15 years—many of them in northern Iraq, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton, has already said. As a responsible member of the Security Council, will the UK Government play a role in ensuring that the operations of the United Nations, UNICEF and the other agencies looking after refugee camps—and the progress made there over the last 12 months—can continue somehow under the surface,

and that those displaced and still living in refugee camps, in many cases after seven or eight years, will have some relative safety within this overall escalation of tension?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I pay tribute to the work the noble Lord has undertaken; I know he has visited Iraq and had a very constructive visit on the ground. I assure him that, yes, we are working through all organisations. As the Minister for the United Nations, I assure him that we are very keen to ensure that the gains made through various UN efforts—not just the humanitarian support we have provided but, in particular, as I referred to earlier, the UNITAD mission, which is bringing justice; this point was point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Alton—are sustained. Indeed, one of the first questions I raised was about the mission's continuity. Through the Iraqi Government—my right honourable friend the Prime Minister stressed this point to the Prime Minister of Iraq during his conversation with him yesterday—we are certainly seeking to ensure that the gains we have made on the ground, both through our bilateral relationship and, importantly, through the various UN missions, are not just sustained but strengthened at this time.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, now that the JCPOA—recklessly abandoned by the US President—hangs by a thread, does the Minister agree that the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will be absolutely crucial in restoring trust, and that the UK must play a serious and major role and use that process to demonstrate commitment to genuine nuclear disarmament, as demanded by our commitments under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I have already talked about the importance of retaining the JCPOA. The noble Baroness says it is hanging by a thread; it is. Although the US has walked away from that agreement, we retain solidarity with our European partners in sustaining the JCPOA and continue to leave the door open on diplomacy with Iran, because we believe that while it is not a perfect deal—far from it; it does not cover certain types of missiles—it provides some degree of stability, and we hope we can return to it. On the wider issue of non-proliferation, it is for the whole world to reflect on its importance and its role in this respect. I am sure we will continue to play a leading part in different international fora in ensuring a more peaceful world around us.

Lord Pickles (Con): My Lords, my noble friend has announced a number of reviews; I wonder if I could suggest an additional review. Given that he has rightly identified the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a source of instability in the region and that it has consorted with a terrorist organisation both in the region and in Europe, may we also review and consider whether we should join our American allies in proscribing this organisation? This would send a clear signal to Iran that the normalisation of relations cannot be conducted through a terrorist organisation.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: First, I agree with my noble friend that Her Majesty's Government do not and will not seek to be associated with any terrorist organisation. We condemn all acts of terrorism, wherever perpetrated and whoever the perpetrator. On my noble friend's specific question about proscribing this organisation, I have already said what our view of the organisation is. If it meets the requirements of the criteria for proscribing an organisation, I am sure it will be looked at at the appropriate time.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): Can the Minister confirm how far British forces are able to operate autonomously in the Gulf? I have been led to understand that the evacuation of British forces on the ground in Iraq depends on American support. I note that the air officer commanding is embedded in a US airbase and I understand that British ships are part of the US-led task force. Are we, in effect, embedded in whatever the Americans do, or can we take back control, to coin a phrase?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Lord will know from his time at the Foreign Office that we work closely with our allies, and the United States is a key ally in our operations in Iraq. I am not going to go into any particular measures that have been taken, suffice to say that we and the US have made it clear to Iraq that the gains made on the ground have been achieved because of the operations of both US and UK forces, as well as other personnel. We hope that, through discussions, the stability that has been achieved will continue.

Queen's Speech

Debate (2nd Day) (Continued)

4.45 pm

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, following the last debate on Iran, I think it is wise to take a step back from the detail, to which we shall shortly return, to consider culture and principle.

Twenty-twenty vision is something that, if claimed, proves only that the claimant is deluded. However, leaving fantasists to one side for a moment, we might take some wisdom from the late former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Helmut Schmidt. At the age of 91, he wrote a book called *Ausser Dienst*, or "out of office", in which he advises young Germans considering a career in politics not to do so unless they speak at least two foreign languages to a competent degree. His reason? You can only understand your own culture if you look at it through the eyes of another culture, and to do that you need language; some things cannot be translated.

On the anniversary this week of Anthony Eden's resignation in the wake of Suez, and as the UK plans to leave the European Union and unleash its potential on a waiting world, Schmidt's advice is both prescient and apposite. The British Government should never take it for granted that living on an island generates a very particular, if not peculiar, psychology and that this has an impact not only on how we understand

[THE LORD BISHOP OF LEEDS]

ourselves but on how we perceive the way we are perceived by other nations. This is why the first couple of years of the post-referendum Brexit debate led to incredulity and bewilderment among many of those looking at us from the outside.

Behind all the politics and trading technicalities of Brexit lies the ineluctable fact that, on this hyperconnected, small planet, no policy on anything can ignore its implications for the wider picture. Foreign policy is not primarily about “us” directed at “them”, but rather “us” behaving as part of “them”. Integral to this is the first rule of negotiation: to look through the eyes of the interlocutor in order to see ourselves as we are seen. In other words, we need our Government to go beyond easy slogans such as “Get Brexit done”, or even “Global Britain”, and consider how actual policy is to be worked out with real people and how the implications and consequences of that policy are to be understood and responded to by those with whom we claim to be interconnected partners. I am seeking here not to avoid the pragmatics of policy-making—no doubt other noble Lords will attend to that—but to argue that there is an urgent need for this Government to look beneath the political game-playing to the deeper, long-term dynamics of both ethical substance and communication.

I will not be alone in noting that the language of insulting other European Union countries, as if they were not listening or could not understand English, has now changed to the language of “our friends and partners” in Europe. That is good, but our friends and partners will not have forgotten and they are not stupid.

The UK's response to the assassination of General Soleimani in Baghdad last week, as we have just discussed, further exposes both the interconnectedness of foreign policies and the particular impact of trade dependency on the United States of Donald Trump—something that will not be lost on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe or her family.

Daily reading of the Bible, which is in my job description, reinforces a sense of the transience of power in history. The Old Testament shows that quick and obvious defence alliances often led to terrible longer-term enslavements. Empires came and went, their hubris dribbling away into deserts of exiled misery, and powers and rulers never learned, even when they seduced their people into what turned out to be false securities.

Ethics is, first and foremost, an exercise in sympathy, looking through the eyes of others. The ethics of our foreign policy priorities must begin with an understanding of what drives other countries in their domestic and foreign policies, and a cultivated willingness to shape ours in the light of how we are seen by others.

I hope that the Government, with some humility and deeper cultural thinking, might just listen to those who wish to see global justice and peace worked out in this complex world by people who are not driven by claims to power but by the imperatives of mutual human flourishing.

4.50 pm

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-Afl) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, I welcome this opportunity to make my maiden speech on the gracious Speech. Allow me to introduce myself. I am from Downpatrick in Northern Ireland. I have been steeped in politics and have represented the Downpatrick area for decades: as MP for South Down, as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and before that as a local councillor. I have also had the privilege of being the SDLP party leader and of representing my party in government as Minister for Social Development in the power-sharing Executive.

I have been delighted to be able to include Downpatrick in my title in this House. It captures the place where I live and where I have dedicated my political service to date. Downpatrick is also well known as the last resting place of our national saint, Patrick, and the place most closely associated with him. Patrick was a fifth-century pluralist who championed the Christian message in Ireland and whose heritage today belongs to everyone. His unifying message, which long predates any of our historical quarrels or divisions, can bring people together in our divided land. It also informs how I go about the business of politics. I believe that we have to transcend political, ethnic, religious and other differences to compromise and co-operate so as to bring about the essential healing that is required in our fractious world today. So that is Downpatrick—my origins and my title.

I am also an Irish nationalist of the social democratic tradition and a firm believer in pluralism, inclusion and building reconciliation. I am a firm supporter of the principles of the Good Friday agreement, and sit next to the noble Lord, Lord Murphy of Torfaen, one of the negotiators of that agreement. Indeed, the Good Friday agreement is the embodiment of my political philosophy—respect for difference, partnership, unity in diversity.

The Queen's Speech deals with so many issues that it is impossible to address them in a short contribution. Today's selected topics are all, shall we say, impacted upon by Brexit. Of course I want to deal with that and Northern Ireland. Brexit has now become one of the greatest political issues in, and between, Britain and Ireland. It has consumed all aspects of our lives in Northern Ireland since the referendum of June 2016, where in the majority people voted to remain. It has impacted on and reawakened controversy around issues of identity, nationality and sovereignty. It has also undermined the very principles of the Good Friday agreement in relation to reconciliation and building a shared society. It has deepened political divisions at a time when our political institutions were already unstable and has allowed some parties to characterise proposed trading arrangements as “life or death” constitutional determinations.

Like the majority in Northern Ireland, I prefer and want to remain in the EU but acknowledge that with the Government's majority in this Parliament we will soon leave. But we will be leaving the one institution that has helped provide so much political, social and economic stability on the island of Ireland. Membership

of the EU has contributed significantly to reconciliation and to the development of our economy and infrastructure.

I hope that in their forthcoming EU negotiations, the Government ensure that this international underpinning can be sustained in any new working arrangements. I come from an area that includes our two most important fishing ports in County Down. I have heard and understood the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, referring to the fishing industry and the fisheries Bill. However, the fishing industry has a great deal of insistence that our current unfettered access to the British market must continue. Put simply, we do not want borders in Ireland or the Irish Sea, or any increase in bureaucracy. I hope this can be addressed and resolved.

In my final few minutes, I want to address the pressing issue of the need to reinstall political institutions in Northern Ireland and the principal institutions of the Good Friday agreement. People abdicated the responsibility some three years ago. That led to the collapse of those institutions. At the door, the one thing that people said that they wanted was those institutions up and running, delivering for our people in health and education and dealing with the impact of Brexit. They also wanted people to take their seats in the other place, because they wanted all these issues to be urgently addressed.

Along with other noble Lords, my priority will be to work towards building reconciliation, fairness, equality and a shared society in Northern Ireland. This must include a plan to end division and to bring down the physical and mental walls of division. I hope that we can work across this House to support a process of moderation and peaceful politics in Northern Ireland, a comprehensive trading deal with the EU to assist our economy and a plan to end austerity and poverty, particularly the ongoing punitive nature of welfare reform.

Above all, I hope to contribute to a recovering politics in this Parliament, a politics that must recover from the battering it has taken from the intolerance, dishonesty and revisionism that have surrounded the Brexit discourse. Many of us are horrified at the state of politics today. We now live in a world of lies and exaggeration, of voter distrust and of fake news. We must pass on better politics to the next generation and get beyond slogans and spin. In this context, I am reminded of a quotation from a famous Irish thinker and poet, George Russell, who said:

“No blazoned banner we unfold—
One charge alone we give to youth,
Against the sceptred myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth.”

Along with your Lordships, I want to make my contribution to ensuring that we can make that plan towards reconciliation, within Britain and between Britain and Northern Ireland.

4.58 pm

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen (Lab): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick. We have listened with great interest and admiration, and in much agreement with what she says. She brings a

unique experience to this House in all the fields that she has served, and she comes from a part of the United Kingdom which deserves her voice in its affairs. She was quoted recently in the *Irish Times* as saying:

“Politics... is about serving, it is about reflecting, it is about representing. And I believe the House of Lords offers that opportunity”.

In that, and in many other things, she is absolutely right. We look forward to hearing more from her in the future.

This Government came to power last month with a mandate and a majority gifted by, let it be said, the incompetence and stupidity of the Labour leadership. But even if the Prime Minister has power, he has serious dilemmas to face as well. Leaving aside the claim of “getting Brexit done”, which cannot be done in the promised timescale, he also has on his plate a series of promises and spending commitments that will require serious and very difficult choices to be made, and made very soon. He has promised inside a finite budget more money for education, health, the police and more for the north of England, and then Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will also make demands to keep the union together. He is also committed to at least 2% of GDP for defence and he has to live within the legal straitjacket of 0.7% for overseas aid.

What the Prime Minister does not have is any kind of national consensus on what the country thinks should be the priority on these often competing and occasionally contradictory ambitions. Without some form of consensus, someone, some group, some region, some special interest, some needy area or some raised expectation is bound to be disappointed and let down, and thereafter any popularity will vaporise.

A few weeks ago, I chaired a group of 20 distinguished experts, some from this House, appropriately held in the Cabinet War Rooms to discuss, under the auspices of the new Bletchley initiative, what should be our country's role in a world of Presidents Trump, Putin and Xi. Each of our experts had to bring with them three specific ideas for the table, and the resulting discussion and report was fascinating and revealing. I am happy to supply a copy to anybody who wants it. But the main and unanimous conclusion was that there is an urgent need for a bottom-up national conversation on where our country is heading and its future place in the world. Brexit amplifies that particular need, but it is not its only driver.

If we want, as many in this debate will rightly demand, more money for defence, security and diplomacy, especially in what is an unpredictable, volatile and increasingly dangerous world, as we have seen even in the last seven days, the question is: what gives way in the shopping list of budget items to pay for it? If we genuinely need to spend, for example, more on education, the NHS and long-term care, crime and punishment, because all those items impact directly on every citizen, but we simultaneously need to spend more on defending and making safe those citizens, what do we give up to make it happen?

Some will say that the election fixed the priority orderings, but it certainly did not. Boris Johnson has an 80-seat majority in the House of Commons but based on only 44% of those voting. Indeed, given that turnout was 67%, he obtained only 29% support from

[LORD ROBERTSON OF PORT ELLEN]

the British electorate. So that, in our perverse way, provides a healthy Commons majority but not by any stretch of the imagination is there any consensus on national priorities.

Can a national conversation with unprecedented public consultation actually be had? The answer is “not easily”, but I believe that it should and can be done. In 1997 and 1998, I conducted with the late Robin Cook a strategic defence review based on building from first principles Britain's defence on an agreed foreign policy baseline. We involved the public, Parliament, pressure groups, civic society and every level in the Armed Forces. The outcome was to be ambitious. It was trail-blazing and, most importantly, it was accepted. It lasted for an unprecedented 11 years.

Similarly, the Scottish Constitutional Convention was established in the early 1990s to build a consensus plan for a devolved Scottish legislature. It involved politicians—even from the two parties that boycotted the process—and a wide stratum of the public. At the end it provided a blueprint for the 74% endorsement in the 1997 referendum and 20 years of the Holyrood Parliament.

Then we can take President Macron's radical consultation and conversation which followed the yellow vest protests last year. He and his Ministers went out to the country and engaged his citizens, putting the choices and listening to the answers. Notwithstanding some of the recent protests on pension reform, the yellow vests and their protests have now been marginalised, so it can be done, and in our divided country we desperately need to reach out with the dilemmas, the hard choices and the possible solutions which face us all and then to listen to what the people tell us.

5.05 pm

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: My Lords, I rise to speak about the climate emergency and declare an interest as a member of the advisory board of the Environmental Change Institute in the University of Oxford. It is a privilege to share in this debate and particularly to welcome the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick. Her commitment to her local community and depth of wisdom are very clear.

The Minister said in his opening address that climate change will test us all, and it will. David Wallace-Wells's book, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, should be required reading for every Member of this House as we move forward. Wallace-Wells begins his graphic description of the future of the earth with the unforgettable words:

“It is much, much worse than you think.”

He goes on to describe the effects and the economic costs of bushfires, drought, mass migration, sea and air pollution, flooding and extreme weather. I read Wallace-Wells early last year and have now watched his words become the lived reality of people in California, Australia—as we noted earlier this afternoon—across South Africa and Indonesia and, closer to home, in the floods in South Yorkshire.

We are living through an environmental catastrophe and that catastrophe will increasingly shape our foreign and domestic policy, economic life and politics over the next decade. The science is clear. The needs are

urgent. How will we respond? I welcome all that the Minister said. The Government are to be congratulated on embracing the target of net zero by 2050 and their ambition to lead the COP talks in November. The talks have the potential to change the world in the next generation. I welcome all that the Minister said about the priority of climate change and the range of measures we can expect.

The challenge now is to realise this vision with specific, planned action. First, we need a detailed, accountable plan of how our economy will reach net zero by 2050 or earlier. If we are serious, we must have a year-by-year accountable strategy. Secondly, Governments and responsible investors, including the churches, need to stop investing in and subsidising fossil fuels and invest in renewables here and across the world, as Mark Carney has recently argued very powerfully. Thirdly, let us have some further bold initiatives to show the world that the United Kingdom means business, that we can reach these targets and that we have the courage to bring forward the ban on petrol and diesel vehicles to 2030, to fund an ambitious new home energy programme and to give more detail on the projected investment in mitigation and flood defences here and overseas.

There is a moral imperative to act for the sake of the earth and for the sake of the poorest—those who have contributed least to climate change are suffering the most and will suffer most in the future—but this is one of those very rare moments when to do the right thing ethically is also doing the right thing for the economic prosperity of the country and our place in the world. The cost of acting slowly is increasing. The 2018 forest fires in California have so far cost \$400 billion—the equivalent of the entire US defence budget.

Every year now counts. Your Lordships will remember the story in the Book of Genesis of Pharaoh's dream, interpreted by Joseph: seven fat cows consumed by seven thin cows; seven years of plenty devoured by seven years of famine. We have no need of Joseph to interpret the impending disaster—we have the IPCC and the global scientific community—but we need a Government with the wisdom of Joseph to use these next seven years well and to put us on a pathway to recovery with a new agenda for the next decade for the world. We must not fail.

5.10 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, after those wise words, I begin by declaring my interests as listed in the register: as president of the Royal Commonwealth Society and as an adviser to major Japanese companies and to the Kuwait Investment Office.

There are some very good and not-so-good aspects of the gracious Speech to be noted this time—of course, it is the second in the past year. To start with the best bits, it is obviously good to see the end of the Brexit deadlock in clear sight. The previously paralysed Parliament, which some of us had been pointing out for a long time could be cured only by a fresh election, has now duly been replaced and is a thing of the past. I agree that there are problems with our immediate neighbours to be resolved and arrangements to be

harmonised after 31 January, but we plainly do not want to be tied to, or held back by, any kind of so-called dynamic alignment with an EU, which is so obviously stuck in the past and going through its own severe contortions, and which everyone recognises is in serious need of reform.

There is, of course, the usual crowd saying that the time made available to settle relations with the rest of the EU is impossible—that is the latest moan—but in many cases they are the same people who said that it was impossible for Mr Johnson to strike another deal, that the Irish border problem could never be resolved and that there would be another hung Parliament and that an election would solve nothing. So is there any reason to give their opinions now much weight? The answer is no.

The other sort-of-good-news bit of the Speech is that there is to be an integrated—I like that word—review of Britain's place in the world and foreign policy. Frankly, this is long overdue. It should have been held at least a decade or more ago, as the digital age and the new networked world took hold and changed the entire pattern of international relations and power. Had we done that, we would long ago, and much sooner, have discovered, first, that we need to engage far more purposefully in Asia, where power now lies and where vast new markets, in which we must succeed to survive and prosper, have already arisen.

Secondly, we would have discovered that the United States of America stays a good friend but that the relationship has changed from the old pattern of 70 years past, and that even before Trump appeared it was clear that our world views no longer coincided. A new relationship should have been built up long ago. Meanwhile, we are subjected to dim-witted columnists who write about an alleged choice between Europe and America that does not exist. Have these people forgotten about China's growing role in the Middle East and world affairs and that we now live in a network world, or that in any case we already have reasonably good trade relations with America? I fully share the view that Iran is a great nation that has been dragged down by the mullahs, from whose narrow, bigoted rule Iranians must be freed, but I do not believe that assassinations of their blood-soaked generals is the right way to go about it. The nuclear agreement with Iran finally having been finished off certainly makes the whole world a very much more dangerous place.

Thirdly, we should have realised much sooner that relations with China were becoming crucial, although they needed to be carefully balanced with our relations with the third richest nation on earth—measured by GDP if that means anything—namely Japan, which always saw us as its best friend in the West but which we keep overlooking. We might also have managed the Hong Kong situation better had we had better dialogue with Beijing.

Fourthly, we should have seen earlier that defence and security have come to change their meaning in the age of cyber warfare, drones, street terrorism and nuclear weapons development. We might then have avoided the disastrous decisions which have been made by those in charge of our defence procurement in recent years, which must now be corrected. We might

have perceived earlier that NATO's purposes and structures needed radical overhaul in this utterly changed digital age.

We might have realised sooner that, while we must continue to contribute heavily to the welfare of humankind, the idea of our enormous DfID budget being completely separate from our overseas power deployment and foreign policy is absurd and wasteful. Finally, we might have grasped quicker that all kinds of new networks have grown up across the planet, not necessarily between Governments but between professions, interests, young people, business and trade in services and knowledge products in which Britain should be seeking the closest possible involvement, not least with the Commonwealth, the biggest network of all, in which we are fortunate, although barely deserve, to be members.

That brings me to my final comment. Although the Commonwealth was rightly mentioned by my noble friend Lord Gardiner, there was, alas, no mention of it at all in the gracious Speech—either this one or the last one. That, I think, was a discourtesy to Her Majesty who, after all, is head of the Commonwealth to which she has devoted most of her reign. It may sound a minor omission, but it tells us clearly one thing: that the strategists and mandarins deep in Whitehall have simply not yet grasped the nature of Britain's modern exceptionalism, new world role or potentialities in a shifting international order.

5.16 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I want to make a few comments on the integrated security, defence and foreign policy review, which is a welcome development in the Government's plans for the next five years.

I note that the Government will consider the, “freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law” of foreign nations and how this interacts with our own interests. I hope that the Minister will agree with these Benches that any such review should also include religious persecution, drawing on the work and recent report of the Foreign Office, assisted by the Bishop of Truro, on the persecution of Christians.

Of course, this is not just about Christians being persecuted. Many Members of this House share my concern at the persecution by the Myanmar Government of Rohingya Muslims and the increasingly desperate situation facing Uighurs in Xinjiang province. The use of alleged detainment camps, the attempts by the People's Republic of China to distract attention from the destruction of historic places of worship, and the suppression of Uighur culture is shocking.

I hope that any strategic review will be able to explain to this House and indeed the wider world, which looks to our democracy as a beacon of hope, how issues of religious persecution will be treated by any future UK Government. The nation's withdrawal from the EU must not be a cause of pursuing “strategic interests” and commerce at the expense of challenging nations concerning issues of persecution. Can the Minister confirm that this will be considered and emphasised in the review?

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]

Many in this House have shared my concerns about the Ebola crisis in the DRC. I have been pleased to meet with Ministers to discuss the matter and I was heartened by the comment of the Minister about Her Majesty's commitment to tackling this dreadful epidemic. The situation is complicated due to the brutal massacres carried out by ADF and the subsequent breakdown of trust between local communities and the UN, leading to the latter's withdrawal from some Ebola treatment centres. My most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury—who was here earlier but sadly could not be here for the whole debate and was unable to speak—has had calls with the UN Secretary-General and the Vatican to explore ways to rebuild community relationships.

The UK Government's support is needed to help MONUSCO's reform, ensuring that it works more effectively with communities and the Congolese army, and to prepare for a post-Ebola period. As churches are often the only organisations left on the ground in these war zones, we are uniquely placed to deliver assistance, with the aid of the UK Government, and to use our networks to provide health education programmes. These are being rolled out at present through the churches in areas where some of the aid agencies are no longer able to operate.

I turn to the peace process in South Sudan. It has been encouraging to see some signs of progress in the last month, but sustained pressure from the UK Government is required to ensure that the transition maintains the ceasefire and benefits all the people. Pressure on the deadline alone without tackling outstanding divisive issues—particularly the number of states and boundaries, and unified security—risks a return to conflict and oppressive rule by the incumbent Government. Recently the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, along with the Pope and the former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, sent an unprecedented joint letter to the political leaders, four of whom participated in the Vatican retreat in April 2019, encouraging a

“renewed commitment to the path of reconciliation and fraternity”.

It is important that political pressure is added to this initiative. Can the Minister assure us that this will be followed up and that peacebuilding in the region will be part of this urgently needed review, to which we look forward in the coming months?

5.21 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, we are in a highly volatile and dangerous world, but despite that I am afraid that Her Majesty's most gracious Speech is rather light on defence. I have become used to what successive Prime Ministers have described as the most important responsibility for any Government, the defence and security of our nation and people—and of course it is—being consigned to the end of the speech, and on this occasion only 26 words nod towards the funding necessary to ensure our nation has the requisite Armed Forces.

The statement that:

“My Government will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces”

is meaningless. There are presumably idealists who would not wish to invest in our Armed Forces, but in this very dangerous world, while we may try to avoid conflict, the same, I am afraid, is not true of everyone whom we confront in this world. Hilaire Belloc captured the reality with his little rhyme:

“Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight,
But Roaring Bill (who killed him) thought it right.”

I do not want my nation to be killed.

The Government quite correctly plan to undertake an integrated security, defence and foreign policy review to reassess the nation's place in the world. That is absolutely right and I am delighted that it is going ahead. We need clarity over our foreign policy now that so many of the old certainties have disappeared and been replaced by confusion. However, I am concerned about the basis on which the review is being conducted. Downing Street has started setting out parameters, one of which is that

“the new strategy will seek to modernise defence”—
fine—

“while reducing costs in the long term.”

The 2010 and 2015 SDSRs were incoherent cost-cutting exercises with little regard to strategy or strategic thought. It seems that our political culture recognises only as much threat as it is willing to spend money on, rather than the realities of the world. One of our many strategic delusions is to undertake reviews that set objectives based on an analysis of the strategic environment and then simply refuse to fund the consequent strategy.

Since the last SDSR in 2015, a growing number of defence experts, many of them in this House, have pointed out that there is not sufficient money in the defence budget for the planned defence force 2025. I personally have raised that issue on numerous occasions. Time and again we have been told that we are wrong and everything is fine. Lo and behold, on 20 December the Defence Secretary said that there was a shortfall in funding in the Ministry of Defence budget—what a surprise—and the military will have to

“cut its cloth to meet its ambitions.”

That is an insult. These are not the military's ambitions but, rather, the requirement identified by the Government in SDSR 2015 to ensure the security of our nation and people, which has not been properly funded.

I am afraid that there is a large lobby, including senior officials in Whitehall, who are willing to take ever greater risks with the defence of our nation. As for spads' advice, well, defence spending is not a vote winner, so we get no joy from them at all.

We have taken risk on risk, and I fear that trying to use cyber and the impact of the fourth industrial revolution as a way of saving money and pretending that our forces have the same effect is naive in the extreme. Yes of course there have been these huge changes. I was the first Cyber Minister in 2009; I am aware of these changes. But that does not mean you can save money on defence by using these other ways of fighting. Kinetic effect is still very important.

In the gracious Speech, the Government say they will promote and expand the UK's interests and influence in the world, stand firm against those who threaten the UK's values and try to encourage peace and security globally. All of this demands hard, as well as soft, power, and I am afraid that the Government are not

investing in hard power. They will not achieve any of these things unless we have hard, as well as soft, power.

I do, however, share Mr Cummings's concerns about defence procurement, which needs a shake-up, but let us be clear: politicians have been guilty over the years of repeatedly seeking cost savings during build that reduce capability and push up cost; delaying main-gate decisions, again boosting costs; changing their minds about what they want an asset to do; and repeatedly changing their minds about the number of assets to be procured, then pushing up development and construction costs per unit. They have done this again and again, so it is not clear-cut. The aircraft carrier programme suffered all of these, but, despite that, Britain has now paid for and has in service two world-beating aircraft carriers—thank goodness—even though successive British Governments have done all they could to destroy our shipbuilding industry.

The Prime Minister recently stated that our nation requires

“a shipbuilding industry and Royal Navy that reflect the importance of the seas to our security and prosperity.”

Hurrah for that. The recent order of five frigates to replace those going out of service does not achieve this aim. Our shipyards and SMEs are collapsing. They need commitment and a large rolling programme, and the Navy is desperate for more ships. The shortage has already been felt in the Gulf. Should—God forbid—there be military action in the Gulf, we may find that we are wanting. Expansion of the fleet and enhanced defence spending are an urgent requirement.

5.26 pm

The Lord Bishop of Durham: My Lords, initially I want to note how little reference there is in the gracious Speech to the needs of children, except in the realm of education. There is nothing about children's first 1,000 days, nor any firm commitment to tackle the iniquity of child poverty. How we treat children speaks volumes for where our priorities lie. Could the Minister please comment on this omission?

Before proceeding further, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on her passionate and insightful maiden speech.

I welcome the focus of the gracious Speech on the United Kingdom's international engagement. However, some of the language used concerns me. All people, in all nations, are loved by God. The commitment to uphold human rights globally recognises this and, as we leave the EU, we must look outwards to avoid isolation. I worry, though, that our international focus is on how the UK stands on the international stage after Brexit, rather than on how we use that position, particularly how we use it to alleviate crippling poverty in developing countries. We must not have a solely self-centred approach to our international affairs. If DfID is merged with the FCO, there is a worry that UK aid will be used to advance UK foreign policy as opposed to being invested in alleviating poverty. Can the Minister allay our fears on this?

I welcome the Government's continuing commitment to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on overseas aid, but will the Government confirm that this will be used not for our own gain but solely for the relief of poverty, tackling climate change and development?

In July, 1,142 bishops and spouses of the Anglican Communion across the globe will gather at the Lambeth Conference, many of them from nations tackling deep poverty and facing the direct impacts of climate change. They demonstrate that local church communities are excellent deliverers of sustainable development. Will the Government commit to continue to work with development agencies, such as Christian Aid and Tearfund, to deliver, through faith communities, the best use of development aid?

Aid alone, however, cannot tackle the task of lifting the poorest out of poverty. Trade will always be more significant than aid. So, with a fresh vision for trade, could we not seize the opportunity to lead the way in helping to improve trading for and with the poorest nations? We can surely offer a better model than the investment and support provided by nations such as China and Russia to nations such as Burundi and Rwanda, which often exploit natural resources and do not build the local economy, skills and knowledge in the long term. Let us look justly for trade deals with poorer nations which help them to develop, recognising that mutual benefit is better than exploitative practices.

I therefore note with pleasure the commitment in the gracious Speech to stop the export of polluting waste to countries outside the OECD. According to Tearfund, every 30 seconds someone dies because of diseases caused by plastic pollution. Many communities cannot adequately dispose of their plastic waste. Countries are themselves aware of the problem of multinational consumer goods companies selling single-use plastics, so the Rwandan Government were the very first to ban plastic carrier bags—way ahead of us. How will the Government ensure that life-saving aid money which is given to subsidise private sector investment in continents such as Africa is not used to commit environmental violations?

It was a shame that the gracious Speech did not commit to stop investing in fossil fuels. Our international development must be sustainable, investing in initiatives that focus on developing small community projects that create innovative off-grid access to energy.

Agriculture is vital in international development; it is also vital here. Along with hospitality, social care and other so-called lower-skill industries, agriculture requires good migrant labour. Any points-based immigration system must ensure these needs are met and uphold our value of treating all well. This includes refugees and asylum seekers. Here is one idea: if vulnerable refugees have skills we require, could we add points to assist them as migrants? This leads me back to where I began, on vulnerable children. The provisions dealt with in Clause 37 of the EU withdrawal Bill need to be retained to protect the most exposed children in our world.

5.32 pm

Lord Patten (Con): My Lords, wishing to reflect those sensible calls for post-general election result renewal and reconciliation, I set about ransacking our party manifestos for any evidence that there might be a consensus between the parties. To my surprise but delight, the most striking evidence of consensus is on

[LORD PATTEN]

the need to plant more trees. Whatever the numbers, I believe we should plant trees early, plant well and plant native, by planting lots of broadleaf trees where possible and resisting the needless cutting down of trees and hedges in town and country alike. That is why I welcome so much what my noble friend Lord Gardiner of Kimble had to say about the importance of trees when he introduced this debate.

The UK is certainly not well wooded by international standards. At one end of my Westminster and home commuting life, we live in one of the very least well wooded districts in England, South Somerset. We certainly need new housing but, alas, just as they simply do not make new land any more on which to build new housing, it is important that sites must be carefully chosen, with trees which are needed for health and wildlife. Trees are an integral part of not just a new place but creating a sense of place, giving people something to share and something to breathe. There should be at least two new trees planted for every new house or apartment built in this country, in addition to which every street should have some fruit trees—and not just those landscape architects' street trees.

This should be paralleled by a national consensus that we need a complete moratorium on the needless cutting down of trees and hedges: no more chainsaw massacres, as alas we saw in Sheffield. I hope that the relatively new Sheffield city region, which I wish well, will now undertake to make recompense by replanting at least one tree for every one that was needlessly cut down. Replanting in cities is just like rewilding in the countryside, and greatly needed. In saying this, I know that I point a finger at one particular political party but I can also point it at the Liberal Democrats. For example, I live in a Liberal Democrat-run area in South Somerset. I am pretty unusual in this, just as their control is pretty unusual in the rest of the country, and I regret the way in which they permitted past developments to happen without adequate tree cover, and sometimes with such loose planning provisions that developers have been able to ignore those glamorous drawings which they put before councils. We have not seen those trees.

In the same way, I am quite prepared to criticise my own party—the Tory party—in Somerset. Over the years there, the highway authority has needlessly and grossly overlit the streets with ugly sodium and yellow lights, which has done no end of damage to nightlife and people's sleeping. It has always been put forward as good for road safety but, as shown by the Department for Transport, there is no indication that there is any automatic link between reducing street lighting and an increase in road accidents. It is quite clear that the dumping into the night sky of unnecessary light pollution is just the same as the dumping on street corners, roadsides and highways of litter. All local councils should give this considerable thought. If it is good for children to see some fruit trees in the streets of new housing developments, it is very good for them to be able to see the stars as well. Local authorities have a major contribution to make in this respect.

I end as I began. It is good to see compromise, if it can be found, but of course I recognise that political parties come into existence to reflect and nurture different points of view, so compromise is never easy. But in seeking compromise, at least the body politic in this country can look at the Conservative Party and know what the nature of our conversation with the nation is to be over the next decade. Many commentators now say that with the lengthy elections we are to have for the leadership of the Liberal Democrat and Labour parties, and the possibility of more than one Labour or Liberal Democrat leader in the 2020s—we are only just in the foothills of the 2020s—we urgently need to know what sort of conversation the opposition parties want to have with the nation. For good or bad, we are entirely transparent as to what we wish to do. We have no idea at all—it is a bit of a magical mystery tour—what kind of national conversation Labour and Liberal Democrats wish to have. That is bad for democracy.

5.37 pm

Lord Sharkey (LD): My Lords, I was glad to see Cyprus mentioned in the Tory manifesto in the context of resolving the long-standing and damaging division of that island. This division quite unfairly penalises the Turkish Cypriots, through no fault of their own. It has now continued for 50 years and the plight of the Turkish Cypriots gets worse. Economic output lags behind, trade is significantly embargoed and dependence on an increasingly erratic Turkey increases. The existence of a distinct Turkish Cypriot identity is also under real threat, as Turkish immigration increases.

Ever since the de facto partition of the island, however, there have been efforts to reunite it. The latest efforts began in 2015 with the election of President Anastasiades in the Greek south and President Akinci in the Turkish north. Talks continued until a final conference in Crans Montana in July 2017, when negotiations collapsed at the very last moment. The United Kingdom had been heavily involved in these talks, not only because of our long historical connection with Cyprus but because we remained—and remain—a guarantor power. Blame for this collapse was, of course, attributed by each side to the other. Things have not stood still since then. The entire eastern Mediterranean region is enormously more turbulent and less stable, while behaviour becomes harder to predict with any confidence at all. The north of the island continues to live under an unfair, unjust and unnecessary embargo; the south continues to be a magnet for Russian money and influence. The undersea oil and gas assets around the island are contributing to greatly increased tensions rather than to greatly increased prosperity. Turkey remains a significant factor in how and by whom these resources are developed. It has taken an increasingly assertive stance over drilling rights. Warships have been deployed.

Equally, proposals to build a new undersea pipeline from Israel to Greece and Italy via south Cyprus and Crete, signed last Thursday, have been condemned as unrealistic, provocative and needlessly expensive. Turkey has stated bluntly that no project can be successful that excludes Turkey and Turkish Cypriots.

Despite all this, there are some grounds for guarded optimism. In his report on Cyprus of last November, the UN Secretary-General says:

“I continue to hold out hope that a durable settlement to the Cyprus problem can be achieved ... I have continually emphasized that natural resources in and around Cyprus constitute a strong incentive for a mutually acceptable and durable solution”.

He also notes the findings of the recent World Bank public perception survey financed by the EU. This shows that a majority of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots found that the status quo was unacceptable and that support for a settlement had reached an all-time high, with a clear majority of respondents being in favour. The same survey also confirmed that the only mutually acceptable solution remains the bi-communal, bi-zonal federation model.

What can the UK do to continue to help? I suggest three measures for the Government's consideration. The first is to remove the requirement that all passengers travelling from London to Ercan in Northern Cyprus must deplane with all their baggage to undergo security checks in Turkey. We imposed this condition relatively recently and we could lift it. I know from conversations with President Akinci and his officials that they would install and allow monitoring of any equipment or security regime we thought necessary.

The second measure is to investigate and encourage with other interested parties means of improving access for the north to international capital and investment. The third is to build on the success of the limited number of confidence-building measures by providing help and advice on the implementation of the further 21 measures proposed by the UN Secretary-General in February 2019. Any of these would greatly help and I commend them to the Government.

5.42 pm

Lord Jay of Ewelme (CB): My Lords, it is always a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Sharkey. I join others in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on her maiden speech. I much look forward to further contributions from her—and that is not just politeness.

I shall assume that we leave the European Union on 31 January and that—no doubt with a bit of turbulence towards the end of the year—we end the transition period more or less on time. The question is what Britain's role in the world will be beyond that and how, to quote the previous gracious Speech, the UK is to

“play a leading role in global affairs ... alongside international partners to solve the most pressing global challenges.”

The aim is admirable; achieving it is far more difficult, especially in a world increasingly dominated by an oscillating relationship between the US and China and by an irascible and unpredictable US President capable of taking unilateral and dangerous decisions, as with the assassination in Baghdad of Qasem Suleimani.

There are two precepts that we need to follow. The first is that we need a clear sense of our own interests and values. We should not associate ourselves with the United States if it is wrong and we should not distance ourselves from other Europeans if they are right. For example, the Government have been absolutely right not to condone the US action in assassinating Qasem Suleimani and to work with the French and Germans

to try to defuse tension now. The Government have also been absolutely right to oppose any attacks on cultural sites.

The second precept, difficult though it may be now, is to work with others to strengthen the multilateral system and the role of international organisations. That will be tough for two reasons: first, because the tendency at the moment is away from multilateralism and away from respect and support for international organisations—and I greatly regret that—and, secondly, because it is not cost-free. Playing the active and leading role in global affairs envisaged in the gracious Speech will require, as well as active diplomacy and a properly funded Diplomatic Service, on which I greatly welcomed the remarks made by the Minister in his opening speech, maintaining or exceeding the 2% of GDP contributed to NATO, maintaining or exceeding the 0.7% of GDP allocated to international development, and—for which all these are necessary preconditions—playing an active and effective role in the UN Security Council and in equally important but often neglected other aspects of the UN's work, particularly in the developing world.

Finally, and closer to home, I would be grateful for the Minister's assurance that the integrity of DfID will be preserved. It makes sense, as others have said, to look at how foreign policy, defence policy and aid policy can be better integrated, complementing and not conflicting with one another, through a stronger role for the National Security Council or closer links between DfID and the FCO, or both. However, the FCO, despite its many strengths, is not good at managing very large sums of money, and foreign policy often has short-term objectives, while effective aid requires a long-term perspective. Whatever new foreign policy governance arrangements emerge from the review, DfID needs to remain responsible for managing its own budget. I hope, as others have asked, too, that the Minister will assure us that that will be the case.

5.46 pm

Lord King of Bridgwater (Con): I join the noble Lord, Lord Jay, in welcoming the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie. How welcome it is to hear the voice of the SDLP after those of John Hume and Seamus Mallon, balancing out unionist voices. Those voices are important, but the constitutional nationalist voice has for too long been silent.

I also welcome the parade of Bishops that we have had in this debate so far. I hope that they will listen carefully to what I am going to talk about, because I think they have a particular contribution to make. The noble Lord, Lord Jay, talked about the United Kingdom continuing to play an important role in the world, and that is what the Queen's Speech says:

“My Government will work to promote and expand the United Kingdom's influence in the world.”

One issue on which the world must work together and which has suddenly had far greater attention—this came out clearly in my noble friend the Minister's speech, in which he devoted an exceptional amount of time to it—is climate change. We recognise that, and a number of other noble Lords have talked about it. However, there is another issue which is every bit as

[LORD KING OF BRIDGWATER]

important but about which too little is said—I may be the only person talking about it in this debate—and that is population.

When Queen Victoria delivered her Queen's Speeches later in her reign, the population of this world was barely 1 billion—noble Lords know these figures very well. When I first came to Parliament in 1970, it had gone up to 3.5 billion. As I stand here today raising this issue, it is now 7.75 billion, and the forecast is that another 1 billion will be added in the next 10 years, with a further 1 billion in the subsequent 10 years, and that, by 2040, we will be up to 10 billion—trebled in our lifetime. As population grows, the challenge of preventing climate change becomes ever more difficult. There is one new coal-fired power station every week among eight Asian countries seeking to raise living standards for their growing populations. The high birth rate in less developed countries traps more and more people in poverty and devastates the local environment. The consequences are ever more obvious: more failed states; increased competition for food, and even more for water, with the tensions that that brings; and mass migration of people. These are not temporary phenomena. They will grow ever larger unless the world works together to agree positive remedies before it is too late.

I am helped in this by a very interesting article written 12 years ago by a promising journalist called Boris Johnson, headed “Global over-population is the real issue”; we should forget global warming. In it, he expresses his dismay that,

“no world statesmen have the guts to treat the issue with the seriousness it deserves.”

Some 12 years later, with his pledge to work closely with international partners, he should ensure that they do now all have the guts to put population high on the agenda. Then, his proposed remedies included greater literacy, female emancipation and access to birth control. The last line in the gracious Speech proposes sanctions against human rights abuses and ensuring that,

“all girls have access to twelve years of quality education.”

We need to make it possible for individuals to make informed choices for smaller families.

There is an opportunity here which is not always good in connection with our present problems over Iran. Social media can be a huge asset in getting to places that were previously impossible to reach. We see some countries with effective family planning programmes, but all must be encouraged to have them. Our aid programme should be increasingly directed to supporting this. In his article, Boris Johnson complained that certain words had become taboo and that,

“the very discussion of overall human fertility—global motherhood—has become more or less banned.”

More recently, David Attenborough has discussed what he calls the “bizarre taboo” among world leaders against discussing population. He has warned that the demands of mass humanity will destroy not only the natural world but humanity itself. We must break this taboo and I urge our new Prime Minister to read his great article again and give the lead that the world desperately needs.

5.52 pm

Baroness Hayman (CB): My Lords, I declare three interests, as a trustee of the Disasters Emergency Committee, chair of Malaria No More UK and co-chair of the cross-party group Peers for the Planet.

Two important international meetings will take place this year. The first is the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali in June. Alongside CHOGM, there will be a summit on malaria and neglected tropical diseases to assess progress and stimulate action on the objective, set in 2018, to halve malaria in the Commonwealth by 2023. Achievement of that target would make a critical contribution to the bold ambition, laid out in last year's *Lancet* commission report, to eliminate malaria entirely by 2050.

So I welcome the Minister's words about the Government's commitment to malaria. I hope that his noble friend can confirm, in winding up, that the UK will maintain its current level of investment in malaria at least until 2023 and use its final months as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth to persuade other countries to intensify their own efforts. I hope, too, that she will take on board the wise words of my noble friend Lord Jay of Ewelme, and others, about the importance of maintaining a strong and independent Department for International Development.

The meetings of CHOGM in Kigali and COP 26 in Glasgow are far apart geographically, but the links between global health, international development and climate change are close and compelling. The WHO has warned of the risk of a 15% increase in malaria cases over 20 years because of climate change. Some of the poorest countries of the world are already experiencing the effects of droughts, floods and threat to the very existence of small island states. Extreme weather events affect rich and poor alike, as the fires in the United States and Australia demonstrate all too clearly.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford eloquently expressed the potentially catastrophic environmental, economic and social effects of the current trajectory, so I welcomed the obviously heartfelt commitment of the Minister in his speech today and Her Majesty's Government's commitment to the UK achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. As I said, that is also the target date for the eradication of malaria.

I would love to see both things achieved. I will be 100 in 2050, so if we could speed up the timetable a little, I would be very much in favour of that. But I have to accept that achieving net zero in the UK, even by 2050, will be both complicated and challenging. It will require action not just by government, local and national, but by businesses and academics, citizens and communities, individuals and investors, and even rock bands when they go on tour. This House will have a very important part to play in scrutinising and strengthening relevant legislation and policies.

It will also require political leadership to unite the country in a common cause, and that is the polar opposite of the political climate we have experienced over the last five years. When asked to do their bit, many query why they should even bother when what

we as a country can achieve in emission reductions shrinks into insignificance when compared to huge emitters such as China and India and the obduracy of leaders such as Presidents Trump and Bolsonaro.

My response is this: that this country's contribution will be measured not only in the quantity but in the quality of our response, the quality of our imagination and innovation—from power generation to food production, to the harnessing of pension funds to support a new green economy—and the ability, the quality, of our leadership to provide tools that can be adapted and scaled up by others across the world. In this context, I very much welcome the initiatives by the Prince of Wales and Prince William to stimulate and reward such innovation.

There are reasons for optimism as well as fear about the future, but that optimism will be justified only if we recognise the urgency and scale of the challenge and embrace the need for comprehensive, coherent and collective action.

5.57 pm

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I also welcome the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, and look forward to hearing her contributions to debates on Northern Ireland at a crucial time for the Province's future. She is a welcome addition to this House's debates, which have been unbalanced in recent times. I draw attention to my entries in the Register of Members' Interests, because I will talk specifically and exclusively about the future of international development and the Government's priorities for it.

I welcome the Government's commitment to 0.7%. It is an important signal, especially at a time when many people see the UK turning in on itself. However, it does require that official development assistance conforms to both OECD rules and UK law. It is worth recording that we have four Acts of Parliament: the Labour Government's International Development Act; Tom Clarke's International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act, about development across departments; Bill Cash's International Development (Gender Equality) Act; and Michael Moore's ODA target Act.

This proves just how cross-party the support is for international development and for the continuing autonomy of DfID. I share concerns at the suggestion—not in the manifesto, but being mooted—that DfID and the Foreign Office should merge. I completely agree with other contributions that aid and foreign policy must go hand in hand and co-ordinate and work together, and that there is a political dimension to the delivery of aid and development. All that is true, but it does not in itself logically lead to deciding that we have to merge these two departments.

I suggest that while diplomacy is one thing, development is something quite different. It requires a completely different set of skills and a completely different approach. Where the embassies and DfID have been co-located in countries, it has worked well and been constructive, but if we have a commitment to untied, poverty-focused aid, we also have 20 years of expertise within DfID of managing aid and development

programmes. There is a real danger that, if the lead went to the Foreign Office, this could compromise that integrity and actually lead to misspending that I suggest might cause the Government in the end very considerable political embarrassment.

I also want to get some clarification from the Government about how, as we leave the EU, we intend to manage our relationship on development with the EU, which has consistently been voted by the Government as one of their best development partners. Will we continue to have a relationship with the EU? Will we be practically involved in it, and how will we do this in a way that does not also mean that our withdrawal damages the EU's own development projects? Will UK agencies continue to work with the EU and have government support and encouragement to do so?

Also, will the Government clarify the role of spending in middle-income countries, which actually seems to have grown in recent years? We still have operations in Indonesia, the Philippines, China, Brazil and other countries. Since the Syrian conflict, we have an operation in the Middle East, and considerable resource is going there. What will our priorities be for humanitarian support, for climate change and for development and capacity building? They compete with each other for resources and sometimes, as I have mentioned before in this House, I believe that development and capacity building have been undermined by the commitment to the other two. I am not against them, but I think the balance is important.

In the context of building capacity, I contest—and I declare my interests in this—that parliamentary strengthening and working with policy development in developing countries is relatively low-cost but can be extremely effective and should be encouraged. I have had first-hand experience of that. Funding for CDC has increased substantially in recent years. Again, I am not against that, but what are the Government doing to ensure that that development is actually building capacity and skills in developing countries that is sustainable in the long term? What are they doing to involve British businesses in the process of building those skills and that development in those countries? Will the Government continue to focus on building programmes to support people with disabilities? I completely agree with the noble Lord, Lord King, that population is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed. In reality, the issues of population growth and family planning are essential. DfID has a particularly good record on this—in partnership, interestingly enough, with Canada—and I hope that that will continue and grow. I think the noble Lord, Lord King, is absolutely right.

We are far from being late in the debate—there is a lot more to come—but having heard the noble Lords, Lord King and Lord Jay, speak on those issues, I really welcome their contributions, because they speak with real experience and authority. As far as I am concerned, we need to ensure that, while they are co-ordinated, our development objectives can continue to be separate from our foreign policy objectives. We must recognise that population and family planning are crucial to the future of development, and indeed the rights and development of women and families in particular.

6.03 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, I doubt that many people would dispute that Britain's foreign policy—its role in the world—played only a minimal part in the recent general election and figured only marginally in the Queen's Speech we are debating today, so this is surely a moment when we need to address those issues. This is all the more necessary because we are living through a period of considerable turmoil and disruption, some of it caused by our closest ally, the United States, and we will be embarking on these troubled waters in our new post-Brexit capacity, with less ability to influence policy developments in both Brussels and Washington than we had in the past. Power relationships are shifting, often in ways that do not favour us and our allies and friends. The framework of the rules-based international order, which we ourselves did so much to create over the past 75 years, is being challenged and shaken to its foundations.

During 2020 we will participate in four important international gatherings which will do much to shape the world we live in, for better or for worse, and determine our collective response to some of the main global challenges we face. These four are the nuclear non-proliferation treaty's quinquennial review in May, which is incidentally the treaty's 50th anniversary; the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization in Kazakhstan in the summer; the stocktaking on the UN's sustainable development goals, five years into their 15-year span, in the autumn; and, at the end of the year, the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow on climate change.

The background to the NPT review conference in May is certainly not encouraging. The risks of nuclear war, whether by accident or design, are on the rise; the golden era, from the end of the Cold War in the 1980s until about 2015, when we felt able to discount any chance of nuclear war, has ended; arms control agreements are eroding, with the INF gone and New START, limiting Russian and US strategic weapons, needing renewal next year; and the NPT itself, a cornerstone of international peace and security, is living dangerously, with challenges from North Korea and Iran. How best can the world be moved back on to a path of incremental disarmament and arms control? Can a dialogue on strategic stability between the world's principal nuclear weapons states, such as existed even at the height of the Cold War, be resumed? Can nuclear weapons states' military doctrines be made more transparent? Can it be stated again that a nuclear war must not be fought and cannot be won? All these and more questions need to be addressed. I would like to hear how the Government plan to address them during our current rotating chairmanship of the P5 recognised nuclear weapon states, and in New York in May.

On the second event, world trade, for so long an engine of global economic growth, is in the doldrums, disrupted by trade wars, by the unilateral flouting of international rules and by the paralysis of the WTO's dispute settlement procedures as a result of the US refusal to allow the appointment of new panellists. No part of the rules-based international order is under greater and more immediate threat than the WTO. What plans do the Government have to reverse that

trend and to circumvent the paralysis of dispute settlement procedures if the US cannot be persuaded to relent? What prospects are there for plurilateral agreements on trade in services and on digital exchanges, on which so much of our economy now depends? A ministerial answer to these questions would be welcome.

On the sustainable development goals, it would be good to hear how the Government intend to put to good use our leadership role due to the commitment we have made to 0.7% of GNI. How do they see the main thrusts of that expenditure being developed? What are the main shortfalls in the SDGs which need to be remedied this coming autumn, and how will the Government set about doing it?

The task facing COP 26 in Glasgow is a formidable one, whose daunting nature has been underlined by the relative failure of COP 25 in Madrid last month, and it will have to be done without any help at all from our principal ally, the US. It will require advocacy and diplomacy at the highest political level, as was deployed by France when the Paris agreement was put together some years ago. It will also require us to set an example—in actions, not just in words—with our own domestic environmental policies. All the diplomatic advocacy we deploy in the run-up to Glasgow will count for little if we are not putting our money where our mouth is. It would be good to hear something of that in the Government's plans.

All that is to come in 2020, as well as the 75th anniversary of the UN's founding. How well we rise to these four challenges will certainly test the claims the Government have made that Brexit will enhance and not diminish our influence in the world. We shall see. That we need to address them with seriousness and determination is surely not in doubt.

6.08 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): My Lords, it is already well-covered ground, but I want to offer a few words on the interconnected issues of defence and security. During the election campaign the Prime Minister pledged the most profound review of Britain's defence and security needs since the Cold War, and I welcome such an undertaking. As vice-chief in 2010 and as Chief of the Defence Staff in 2015, I experienced both of the last two reviews at close quarters. Both were very much creations of their time. The former was a response to the strategic shock of austerity. The latter was a far more hubristic affair, linking security to prosperity but, in respect of military capability, without ever closing the gap between ambition and resource reality. My honest view of both reviews is that they were exercises in prioritising the affordability of military platforms, garnished with a veneer of strategic insight. They were not that strong on intellectual analysis of a changing strategic context, nor on a redefinition of the UK's place in the world. I sense most contributors thus far agree.

Permit me a few relevant observations. Contrary to the view currently peddled by some, we do not live in the most dangerous of times. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that there has never been a better time to be alive; that societies have become more peaceful; and that we are experiencing historic and sustained low levels of personal and interstate violence.

However, the raw statistics do not necessarily translate into how we perceive our own sense of security. This is partly because we now enjoy a media that is addicted to the sensationalisation of human anxiety but, more significantly, it is because the traditional format of war has been replaced by more insidious forms of interstate rivalry. New vectors of attack, as they are called, have supplanted formal warfare: such things as proxy terrorism, cyberwar, political assassination, disinformation and hybrid warfare, to name the most obvious. When combined with some of the mega-trends of our dynamic planet—climate change, urbanisation, increasing maldistribution of wealth and opportunity, the pace of technical change, the change in demography—we are left feeling very vulnerable at a personal and even at a collective, national level.

I am not so sure about whether this strategic shift from interstate warfare to interstate security malevolence is permanent. What I fear is that we may have started to forget that the relative peace we have enjoyed for the last 70 years or so is not naturally occurring. It is brought about only by the willingness of nations collectively to secure that peace.

The starting point for any profound review of the UK's defence and security posture is to answer two questions. First, if we want to retain, by and large, the rules by which the world is currently organised, we need to decide how big a role we intend to play in the collective defence of those rules. Secondly, having recognised that, in the new security context, even a relatively peaceful world remains a dangerous one, how much national resource should we devote to ameliorating the new security threats to our people to an acceptable level of risk or societal tolerance?

The first question undoubtedly offers us some strategic choices, which will go a long way towards defining "global Britain" and may offer the opportunity to resolve some of the most serious incoherences of our current defence capability. The second question offers us far less discretion for inaction, and we are already well behind where we need to be in terms of organisation and capability.

Either way, I hope that this House does more to inform the debate than simply deploying nostalgia in support of military interest or supporting the view that some form of procurement alchemy will suddenly make all things affordable. I say this because the Armed Forces consist of sensible people. Institutionalised underfunding is not good for recruiting, retention or morale.

6.13 pm

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, there is no doubt either that our leaving the European Union will have profound effects across the board, particularly on our external relations, or that these effects will be felt for several decades to come.

I concede, of course, that the scale of these effects will depend in part on the coming negotiations, for example on the proposed free trade area with the European Union. Will this cover services so vital to us? Will any alignment of our trade policies with the European Union limit, or even block, other likely trade deals? Is the WTO really a valid alternative

option, given its enfeeblement following the US refusal to appoint judges for dispute resolution panels, a point well made by the noble Lord, Lord Hannay?

Obviously, many of the advantages we enjoy in foreign affairs will remain post Brexit, such as our membership of a range of international organisations. Equally, our hard power assets will remain, but the current strength of our Army at 74,000 means that we cannot be everywhere militarily and must surely re-examine our commitments. Our record on soft power is far more impressive. Since its inception in 2015, we have been either first or second in the Portland soft power index. The English language is a major asset for us; as is our vital British Council, which is not mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

I welcome the long overdue review of all our external departments. I join my noble friend Lord Collins, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham, the noble Lord, Lord Jay, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, in raising questions about the danger of DfID returning to the fold of the FCO. Will HMG be giving evidence—as I assume they will—to the review, and will that evidence actually call for a reintegration of DfID into the FCO?

The decision to implement the Truro recommendations on promoting religious freedom overseas is to be applauded. Does this cover all the recommendations? For example, will all relevant external departments adjust their training policies at all levels, from new entrants to ambassadors? How can we influence the EU to follow our example if we are no longer members? I mention in passing that, many years ago, I went to visit an ambassador who I knew fairly well to press him on the human rights of a religious dissident who was imprisoned. He said rather loftily to me, "Well, human rights is the job of my First Secretary. Why don't you have a word with him?" That would not be said nowadays, and I welcome the sea change in FCO practices.

The commitment that, once we leave the EU, we shall promote sanctions for human rights abuses worldwide and build on "existing Magnitsky-style measures" is somewhat puzzling to me. In what way are we constrained now from establishing visa bans and asset freezes? Can the Government say how many individuals have been sanctioned by us since the passage of the Magnitsky amendments to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act? Far from the Government eagerly taking the lead in this respect, I recall that these amendments were forced on a reluctant Government by an all-party coalition led by Andrew Mitchell, Conservative, Margaret Hodge, Labour, and Jo Swinson, Liberal Democrat.

Brexit will lead to major changes. Generations of our diplomats have become accustomed instinctively to co-ordinating policy with our EU partners. When we become, at best, decision-takers, EU policy will surely change and, for example, become much softer on Putin's Russia. On trade, it is claimed that with one bound we shall be free to strike deals with third countries, but there are problems. Our bargaining power will be diminished. The pattern of trade has changed, and, as the *FT* showed in a recent article, Canada's experience of CETA shows some of the problems. Our current exports to India and China are

[LORD ANDERSON OF SWANSEA]

not encouraging; we export roughly the same as France to both markets, but to China less than a quarter of the exports of Germany and to India less than half of Germany's exports, in spite of our vibrant Indian diaspora.

We have a choice between the EU and the US. Our position on most global challenges is closer to that of the EU, as is well illustrated by the recent assassination of General Soleimani. Our interests, military and civilian, are very involved, but the special relationship did not mean that we were consulted. How can the choice on different issues between the US and the EU still be available when we leave the EU? In particular, with the impulsiveness of President Trump, is there not a danger of our being drawn inexorably into the US orbit?

6.19 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, one of the reasons why I was passionate about staying in the EU, imperfect though it may be, is that world peace is fragile. In a post-war, fractured world, the EU in its various guises played a crucial role in securing and holding together different factions so that never again would we face the horrors of a world war. I believe that the world would be a safer place with the UK in the EU.

Britain's post-war role was carved with greater ease once it joined the European Communities in 1973. I am heartened that the Prime Minister wants to see a global Britain continue to exert influence in the world and be a force for good. Ours has been a strong voice—and a force for good—in the EU, and we should not underestimate the amplification of our global influence through it. Our voice in the UN, NATO, the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth has carried the weight of our authority among the EU nations of half a billion people.

Despite the posturing rhetoric, which has now served its purpose and can be discarded, I hope that the Prime Minister will maintain the necessary alignment with the EU so that our economy does not hit the skids and so that we can continue to work together to meet the real challenges of the coming decade, rather than the manufactured ones. I wonder: is the Prime Minister up to the challenge of leadership on the climate emergency? We shall see. He has the opportunity to make his mark with COP 26 in Glasgow later this year.

On the domestic front, the Prime Minister's commitment will be measured by the transformative nature of the infrastructure projects he is planning. Will his vision scan the horizon and move our country to a position of readiness to pounce on the opportunities that the green revolution will bring? We shall see. This is the really important question about his domestic environmental ambitions: will his proposed legislation give real teeth to its enforcer? Will the enforcement body be independent of government and accountable to Parliament? Will it operate openly? The answers to these questions will shed much light on this Government's direction of travel.

I turn to international development. The indisputable fact is that those who are least responsible for the climate emergency—the poor and vulnerable in the

world—will suffer the most from its consequences. The first nation to industrialise has a moral duty to help poorer countries that have not yet industrialised to deal with the impacts of the climate emergency, such as famines, extreme weather events, ensuing conflicts and mass migration.

I wholeheartedly welcome the continued commitment to 0.7% of GNI for international development. However, ODA—official development assistance—is defined as “government aid ... to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries.”

In answering, can the Minister say whether that will continue to be the definition of aid that this Government will abide by? If this is not to be the case, the 0.7% commitment becomes somewhat meaningless. It signals a return to the bad old days of tied aid and aid scandals such as the Pergau dam, which will diminish our standing on the global stage.

Britain was a leading architect of the UN sustainable development goals. Their universal acceptance by UN states was a moment of immense national pride. Yet neither the gracious Speech nor the Government's briefing note makes any mention of them. Can the Minister reaffirm our commitment to the SDGs? If so, can she also explain how dismantling the globally respected department charged with delivery of the SDGs, both here and abroad, will further that commitment? DfID has an enviable record of openness and accountability far superior to that of the FCO and the MoD. In this decade of delivery for the SDGs, I urge the Prime Minister to keep the world-beating expertise within DfID intact and use it to lead the global transformation that the SDGs promise.

6.25 pm

Lord Cameron of Dillington (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the Government on being the first major economy to put a net-zero target into legislation, but we have to get on with it now. It would be fatal to think that we can wait for another 10 years and then see what needs to be done. Above all, we have to put the structures in place as soon as possible.

The public, especially younger voters, want action now. I believe that the 2020s are a do-or-die decade, when the green agenda could become a long-term economic opportunity for the UK. There is a massive new marketplace out there. The consumers and voters of tomorrow from all over the world are completely focused on climate change and are likely to remain so. With a clean UK brand, that image will give our products, over a wide range of goods and services, a huge boost in the world marketplace.

My main point is that this agenda is so multi-departmental that we need a specific Cabinet committee to drive it right from the heart of government—hopefully chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has previous good form in this field.

First, there is the transport agenda. Most people are agreed that electric cars are the way ahead. We need to drive this agenda. Every motorway station needs at least 100, if not 200, fast-charging points. Every car park in the country needs a minimum of 10 charging points per 100, if not per 50, spaces. Every street where cars can park needs charging points. Who pays

for this needs to be discussed, but the Government must drive it. We also need all our trains and shipping to be electric, and we must incentivise the decarbonisation of our air industry.

Taking another area—there are many of them—we need more carbon-free heating systems. Some 30 million oil and gas boilers are currently installed in the UK, with more than 1 million new boilers going in every year. These will all have to go eventually, but there is no excuse for still putting them in new houses or offices. The Government need to incentivise their replacement with air-source or ground-source heat pumps.

Of course, in all this, we need more renewable sources of electricity. BEIS is currently fixated on offshore wind, with its relatively short lifespan, seemingly to the exclusion of all other forms of renewables. I fear that our net-zero target will involve hard choices; perhaps the current aversion to land-based wind power will have to be overcome.

Also, I have already sponsored a debate in this House on the fact that the UK's single most powerful renewable source is our tides, which we almost completely fail to tap into. It seems a crying shame that BEIS cannot offer to support in principle the concept of these 120 to 150-year LIFE projects by offering the possibility of a specified contract for difference for an offshore marine lagoon if all the many other problems can be overcome. All it takes is a signal but, once again, it comes down to hard choices rather than procrastination.

Turning to the other side of the net-zero equation, this Cabinet committee will have to drive the planting and management of 1.5 billion trees, according to the Committee on Climate Change. Such a policy might fit in well with the likely post-Brexit agricultural economy. With beef and sheep farming threatened by Brexit and changing diets, a lot of land, especially on the western side of our country, might be ripe for afforestation, but it will happen only if it can be shown to bring sensible economic returns. Farming families need to be able to live. They need an annual income from trees starting in year one, not to mention years two to 50, before they get a return from forestry. The tax system might work for some, but small farmers, who are the most likely candidates for this change in land use, often fall outside the tax system and they need cash in hand. A national forestry fund, which I have just invented, need not all come from general taxation. Rather like the national lottery, it could be a charity into which we all pay to offset our travel and other emissions. I can see that being popular with some celebrities. I am also sure that there are many celebrities who would welcome such a scheme, which in my view should eventually become compulsory.

Our 2050 net-zero emissions target is a great idea, but if we are going to be serious players in this new positive economic agenda, we must drive it from the heart of government.

6.30 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. We have entered a new international reality in which our fundamental principles

are being challenged, facts are distorted, and policies are conducted on Twitter and executed by drones rather than through diplomacy. Citizens are observers of the spectacle unfolding in front of their eyes, waking up to new realities with little control over their own security. I hope that my noble friend the Minister will be able to tell us when our Government found out about the assassination of General Soleimani. If the Foreign Secretary really found out about the attack at the same time as many of us did, at just after midnight on Friday, then we are collectively in more trouble than I thought possible.

Avoiding being dragged into a conflict in the Middle East must be an urgent priority. I hope that the joint position the Government have taken with France and Germany on Iran will be maintained. The recent events also raise two fundamental questions that we have to consider: what kind of international law are we prepared to protect and respect, and what is our country's strategic direction? We are living through what has been termed a "deepening geopolitical recession", with a lack of global leadership, American unilateralism, the erosion of US-led alliances, Russia bent on undermining the stability and cohesion of the transatlantic alliance and an increasingly empowered China promoting its own model as an alternative to the global stage. Combined with the hostile use of cyber power, WMD proliferation, terrorism, migration, climate change and inequality, we face a perfect cocktail of negative trends at the very moment when we are preoccupied with decoupling from the European Union. I therefore strongly welcome the plan for a security, defence and foreign policy review, as well as the Government's intention to promote and expand the UK's influence in the world.

I would like to make three suggestions in that regard. First, I hope that particular attention will be given to funding for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to ensuring that our intelligence agencies, both human and cyber, have the resources, oversight and permissions they need to meet a growing array of hybrid threats and challenges. In this context, I welcome reports that the Government intend to develop tougher measures to require the registration of so-called "foreign agents" in the UK, so that anyone representing the interests of foreign powers will be obliged to disclose the relationship. I hope that the Minister can update the House on these proposals.

Secondly, I know that, more than ever, in the post-Brexit era Britain will need foreign investment, but I hope that the proposals will be measured against the UK's national interest. I hope that we can consider as a potential model Australia's foreign investment policy, whereby the Government review major investment proposals to ensure that investment and sales decisions are not driven by any external strategic non-commercial considerations.

Thirdly, I welcome the Government's ambition to develop a sanctions regime, to address human rights abuses, as an instrument of UK foreign policy. This is an ambition worthy of the highest praise. My hope is that the Government can live up to this noble ambition with consistency in a world where our trading partner China is erecting so-called re-education camps for the

[BARONESS HELIC]

Uighurs and other minorities; where our ally the state of Saudi Arabia has been found responsible for premeditated extra-judicial execution, and where our Commonwealth ally India has introduced a new citizenship law discriminating against its Muslim population. As these examples show, we cannot pursue our economic interests in isolation from human rights. In that regard, I welcome the Government's strong and clear commitment that all girls need to have access to 12 years of quality education, but I hope that we will not forget the importance of educating boys as well, if we are to address gender inequality.

Finally, while I welcome the fact that the role of the Prime Minister's special representative on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative has stayed intact, and that the review conference will be held in the spring, I hope that the noble Lord, who has done much to ensure that the initiative continues, will be given all the necessary support by both the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. So far, that support has been in short supply. If the Government are serious about wanting to help tackle the scourge of sexual violence, we have to be determined and persistent. So I put it again to the Minister that we should dedicate a minimum of 1% of DfID funds towards helping fight violence against women. Finally, I hope that he can also give an update on the Government's efforts to set up an international accountability body that would ensure that those who commit this heinous crime bear the consequences.

Regardless of how we arrived at this point, Britain is leaving the European Union. Progress and success are possible, but they are not inevitable. I hope that, as we embark on this new era, we will never close ourselves to the world, that we will remain open and that we will make an effort to export not only goods but values too.

6.35 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab): My Lords, I declare my environmental interests as set out in the register. For me, the Queen's Speech felt a bit like Groundhog Day. It heralded an environment Bill, an agriculture Bill and a trade Bill—but we saw all of those last year, did we not? They are all vital for the protection of the environment and for fighting climate change: two existential issues for the UK and globally. The Government have given assurances about maintaining environmental standards, but a commitment to matching Europe's future improvements in environmental standards has gone from the legislation. I am worried about the reliability of government assurances in these circumstances. So, over the next year, this House has a key role in scrutinising and challenging the Government to deliver on their promises in practice. Will the promised Bills do that or will they fall short?

For example, on trade, your Lordships must ensure that, when deals are done, the Government do not compromise on environmental standards, and we must ensure that the trade Bill gives Parliament a strong role in the negotiation and ratification of trade agreements. The agriculture Bill could be the opportunity of a lifetime, because it is the first time in 45 years that we can determine our own sustainable agriculture policy.

I welcome the Government's commitment to the payment of public money for public goods, but can the Minister assure us that they will also establish a strong baseline of regulation for environmental protections to which farmers and land managers need to adhere and that, again, future trade deals will not lower standards or undercut UK farmers by allowing imports of agricultural goods that do not meet our environmental standards.

There are similar challenges in the environment Bill, especially the need to ensure that the legally binding targets are ambitious, enforceable and, above all, delivered, and that a strong, independent environmental enforcer is produced to ensure that public bodies and Government, as well as the rest of us, act.

As chairman of the Woodland Trust, I could not not talk about trees. I very much welcome the commitment of the noble Lord, Lord Patten, in that respect, as well as his identification that during the election campaign it was gratifying to see a kind of arms war in tree planting, and the weaponisation of tree planting as a political tool. I also welcome the Government's commitment to planting an additional 75,000 acres of woodland a year for biodiversity and to tackle climate change, and for all the other benefits that trees and woods deliver. But it is a big challenge when we consider that the previous commitment was to plant 11 million trees over a five-year period. We now need to plant more than 50 million trees per annum, which is a massive uplift.

Can the Minister assure us that we will have a statutory tree strategy that sets out a clear action plan for delivery and tackles three key challenges? The first is to make sure that we plant the right trees in the right place, with native broadleaf planting playing a strong role in climate change and biodiversity, so that we do not rely disproportionately on commercial conifers.

The second is that we will work with everybody who has access to land, including private individuals, companies, schools, local authorities, landowners, farmers and developers, to target the best areas for delivering woods that offer multiple public benefits. Land is limited and we are not making any more of it, so we need a land use strategy.

The third is vast scaling-up of the availability of UK-sourced and grown disease-free tree stocks, so that we do not import more tree disease in the way that ash dieback is now decimating our woodlands.

This House has a very important role to play in making sure that the commitments in the Queen's Speech are actually delivered. On good days I get excited about the opportunities that the environment, agriculture, fisheries and trade Bills offer—then on bad days I remember how much the Government have already diluted the environmental provisions of the withdrawal Bill, and I remember who the Prime Minister is.

6.39 pm

Lord Chidgey (LD): My Lords, our current foreign policy strategy includes a capacity to project power and influence throughout the Middle and Far East, yet—as has been pointed out many times in this House—we have neither the naval, air nor land forces to launch, let alone sustain, this.

Since the introduction of this strategy, significant changes have occurred to the political map. For example, the United States has given notice of the withdrawal of all armed forces from sub-Saharan Africa, which would impact on the viability of the UK presence there.

At the same time, however, Major General William Gayler, in charge of operations at the US Africa Command, was reported from Nairobi as describing the al-Shabaab terror group as a “global menace” in the wake of the Mogadishu attack that left more than 80 people dead. The general said:

“Since al-Shabaab’s first external attack in 2010, the group has ruthlessly killed hundreds. They have attacked and killed African partners, allies and fellow Americans. They are a global menace and their sights are set on exporting violence regionally and eventually attacking the US homeland.”

Meanwhile, in north-east Nigeria there has been an upsurge in the activities of Boko Haram, following past successful attacks in Abuja. During 2019 hundreds of insurgents were killed by security forces.

Elsewhere, the economic aggression practised by China, as an extension of her commercial and military expansion across Africa and Asia, is just as concerning. The aggressive terms of Chinese loans can leave borrowers at risk of forfeiting ownership if they default on debt service-to-revenue ratios.

Aggressive economic expansion can be just as destabilising as military dominance. The development of soft rather than hard power can rebut it. At present we have a wealth of soft power assets to draw on. There is no reason why the Government should not respond positively to Saferworld’s call to effectively reduce conflict overseas and respond to its consequences.

The Government can draw on external expertise to help shape international peace and security, recognising that this ability is not held by Governments alone. International peace and security should be prioritised at the highest level of national security objectives, to which all other aspects of foreign policy should contribute. In the face of state and non-state threats, the UK should champion its democratic values and support the causes of those seeking to build just, inclusive and accountable societies.

After the London CHOGM, the Commonwealth Journalists Association approached me, pressing the need to enshrine Commonwealth media principles in the forthcoming Rwanda CHOGM communiqué, after the failure to achieve this in London. More than 100 journalists were killed in eight Commonwealth countries between 2006 and 2015, mostly with impunity.

Perhaps the most influential vehicle for delivering British soft power is the BBC World Service—the frequency tuned to worldwide for the unvarnished truth in times of unrest and uncertainty. Edward Lucas’s article in the *Times* about life behind the Iron Curtain, listening clandestinely to the signature tune of “Lilliburlero” to announce the start of the BBC World Service news, brought back distinct memories for me. For example, I recalled my teams of engineers isolated in the west African interior—hundreds of miles from basic western comfort, I can assure noble Lords—keeping going to the jaunty strains of “Lilliburlero” heralding news from home every morning. I recounted this tale

to an African journalist I met in Kenya recently. Remarkably, she responded by saying that, as children, she and her sister danced around the kitchen to the tune of “Lilliburlero” when their father, one of thousands of ardent listeners, tuned in for the news.

Today, the BBC World Service delivers news content around the world in English and 41 other language services on radio and TV and digitally. Out of a worldwide audience of close to 400 million, a quarter are tuning in from Africa, to 13 different languages. New government funding since 2014 has seen the biggest expansion in the BBC World Service since the 1940s, with new bureaux opening in Delhi, Lagos and Nairobi. The World Service is seeking further funding to continue the new services beyond 2021 and increase audiences further.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its success, the World Service constantly faces blocking and jamming, as well as restrictive regulatory issues and attempts to intimidate its journalists—for example, for the Iran service. We should applaud their stoicism, recognise it and bring back the instantly recognisable signature tune worldwide—which is, of course, “Lilliburlero”.

6.45 pm

Earl of Devon (CB): My Lords, happy new year. In welcoming a new decade, a new Parliament and a new Government, we also welcome a new relationship with the world in 2020. While looking ahead with ambition, noble Lords will forgive me looking back for some historical wisdom.

Five hundred years ago, Henry Courtenay, the Earl of Devon, marked new year 1520 with a gift of oranges to his king and cousin, Henry VIII. The rare and costly fruit was imported from Iberia to Exeter, evidence of the harmonious new European trading relationships to be celebrated that summer at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, Europe’s last great medieval tournament and yet its first modern intergovernmental summit. It would be ironic if failure to secure EU trading terms in 2020 rendered Seville oranges a rare and costly gift once more. Noting my interests in the register, I ask the Government to do all they can to secure trade in agricultural produce to and from the continent and not to negotiate away British agriculture and our incomparable rural landscape.

As torrential rain has sodden the sowing season and flooded the country, while wildfires torch Australia, the most pressing business of this Parliament will be to legislate the means of achieving net-zero emissions. Many of those means reside within our rural, agricultural communities. Farming cannot deliver the environmental land management required without clarity and confidence in its commercial viability. For years, British farming has operated in a haze of uncertainty in which investment and productivity have flatlined. Now we have autonomy in agricultural policy, will the Government undertake to do all they can to ensure a flourishing farming future? I note particularly Devon’s vulnerable and venerable uplands. Farmed for over 3,000 years, they produce healthy, free-range meat from ancient pasture that sequesters carbon, retains floodwater and supports remarkable ecological diversity. Does Brazilian soya do that?

[EARL OF DEVON]

Echoing the noble Lord, Lord Patten, and the noble Baroness, Lady Young, I note that the Government have committed to planting 75,000 acres of new trees each year to reforest our islands. As the Minister is only too well aware, disease and pestilence are rife in our broad-leaf woodlands and the heroically under-resourced Forestry Commission, in its own centenary year, has been playing a losing game of whack-a-mole in response. If the commitment is to be met, how will the Government ensure access to sufficient quantities of disease-free deciduous saplings? Will they commit the scientific resources necessary to ensure that the trees planted can survive to a healthy harvest?

Returning to history, the continental harmony seen at the Field of the Cloth of Gold was short-lived—much like our membership of the European Union. It took barely 20 years for Henry VIII to break with Rome, fall out with France, divorce his Aragonese wife and behead the poor Earl of Devon. For all its promise, pomp and pageantry, it achieved little.

A far more significant event occurred with far less fanfare exactly a century later, with the departure from Plymouth of a bedraggled, patched-up ship, barely 80 feet long and crammed with over 100 souls—radicals, adventurers, merchants and families. The sailing of the “Mayflower” in September 1620 is one of the world’s most significant voyages. Its quadricentenary resonates with contemporary themes of religious tolerance, migration, indigenous rights, international trade and thanksgiving for the environment. We have an unparalleled opportunity to commemorate the deep cultural and economic bonds between England, Holland, the Wampanoag nation and the United States of America. It is also a helpful reminder to the 30 million-plus “Mayflower” descendants in the US that they came from Devon and might like to return for a visit this summer.

As patron of the “Mayflower”’s 400th anniversary, I congratulate the team on this year’s remarkable programme and ask the Government to confirm the ministerial support they are willing to give to Plymouth and the 13 partner communities hosting these events.

The “Mayflower” provides a vivid backdrop to trade negotiations with the US, which are key to the Government’s international ambition. I lived for a decade in California, and so support this endeavour. However, while enamoured of America’s ambition and invention and the opportunity it promises, I did learn while there a fresh veneration for our imperfect but beloved NHS, for the fierce apolitical independence of our judiciary and for the remarkable flexibility of our constitutional settlement and this mother of Parliaments. I trust that all three will survive this Government’s international ambition.

6.50 pm

Baroness Anelay of St Johns (Con): My Lords, I am ever the optimist, so I believe that the UK can look forward to the new decade and a post-Brexit future. We must be ambitious but smart when we consider how to conduct ourselves on the global stage. We have an opportunity, at last, to give substance to the mantra of “Global Britain”.

It was refreshing to hear human rights mentioned twice in the Queen’s Speech, including a reference to developing a sanctions regime to address human rights abuses directly. I welcome my noble friend Lord Gardiner’s statement today that the Government will deliver on the Conservative Party’s manifesto commitment to

“further develop an independent Magnitsky-style sanctions regime to tackle human rights abusers head on.”

Will legislation be required to establish that independent system and give it powers?

I welcome the announcement in the gracious Speech of an integrated security, defence and foreign policy review to reassess our nation’s place in the world. I sound a note of caution, however: there is always a temptation for Governments to seize the chance to hit a headline or two by making early pronouncements on widespread organisational change before they have taken breath to evaluate the evidence and develop proposals for change that will endure.

The challenge faced by the Government is all the more critical because the international landscape will keep shifting while any review is under way. There is no way to press pause on diplomacy and security matters, as recent events in Iraq show forcefully. The killing of Soleimani, complicit in mass murder in Syria and Iraq and the political mastermind of instability across the region, is significant for all of us. Our troops and our citizens in the region are more at risk now, so we must prioritise protecting them. We cannot yet know the full consequences of these events but, for now, the UK should continue to support our partners in the region and encourage steps towards de-escalation.

The challenges which lie ahead this year provide opportunities for the UK to show how it can play to its strengths. The big diplomatic opportunity will be COP 26, in Glasgow, in November. COP 25 was the longest in history, but still failed to reach consensus in many areas, pushing decisions into this year under rule 16 of the UN climate process. Matters including Article 6, reporting requirements for transparency, and common timeframes for climate pledges were all pushed into this year. The UN Secretary-General said that he was “disappointed” with the results of COP 25 and that:

“The international community lost an important opportunity to show increased ambition on mitigation, adaptation and finance to tackle the climate crisis.”

We must make every effort to ensure that COP 26 does not meet the same fate.

Other significant events this year give the UK the opportunity to show its mettle on the international stage. As the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, mentioned, in April and May, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons meets in New York, against a rather bleak background. At about the same time, the UK will participate in the NATO Defender Europe 20 exercise, which plans to support NATO objectives to

“build readiness within the alliance and deter potential adversaries.”

I was pleased to hear my noble friend the Minister confirm today that the UK will not only honour the NATO commitment to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence but will increase that budget by at least 0.5% above inflation every year of the new Parliament.

The meeting of NATO leaders last month was an unpredicted success, in as much as the final declaration was agreed by all countries. It was a privilege to attend the reception for the leaders at Buckingham Palace. Our Select Committee carried out a short inquiry into the leaders' meeting, and I look forward to receiving the Government's response to the issues we raised in our letter to Ministers. Then, of course, there is the G7, in June, which will be hosted by President Trump at Camp David, in the full beam of the limelight created by the USA's election year.

The challenges are there to be met. We must navigate a path that serves UK interests well and maintains the principles of the rules-based international system. The way ahead will be anything but dull.

6.55 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, I can hardly be expected to welcome the new Government, but nevertheless I congratulate members of the Conservative Party on holding themselves together long enough to get a clear election result. Today, I will probably confine myself to a few words of caution for the Government in the light of that result. It is of course good to see so many familiar faces on the Government Benches—at least for now. I am sure we will be back to business as usual shortly.

I caution first against hubris. We now have a precise psephological and scientific definition of the difference between triumph and disaster: it is less than 1.3%. In other words, between the catastrophic outcome of Mrs May's election two years ago and the last one, the Conservative Party has managed to convince one person in 100 to vote for it. That is a bit of a fragile mandate, but it is a mandate. Nevertheless, a clear working majority in the House of Commons is not a blank cheque.

In view of the events of the last three years, I also caution the Government to try to avoid factionalism within the Conservative Party—we never have that in the Labour Party, as noble Lords will know. I hope that the sense of direction given during the election can be maintained for at least a few more months. I understand that Boris got an oath of allegiance from all his candidates that they would support his deal and his withdrawal Bill. However, that does not go that far because, as we know, this is only the beginning of Brexit. I assume that no such loyalty oath was required by the now former Chief Whip—he is in his place—of Members of the upper House, because we know that there are vastly different opinions on Brexit within government circles, as there are in the country. That will be just as difficult over the next stages of Brexit as it has been for the last three years.

We have a new withdrawal Bill, and later in the week I will explain in more detail why I will not support it. In many ways, it is a worse Bill than that which Mrs May presented us with, but it will probably go through. It is a worse Bill partly because of its effect on Northern Ireland and partly because of its renegeing on previous discussions on equivalence of regulation and alignment with our European partners. It is also only the first stage. In the next few months we will need to settle issues of trade with Europe, America and the rest of the world; issues of migration and

citizens' rights; and issues of agriculture and the environment. I was grateful to hear the words of the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner, in his opening address, but our changed position in the world will require all of us—in Parliament and elsewhere—to face up to some serious issues. That will require co-operation and some degree of alignment, not maximising divergence from our European partners.

I also caution the Government against making reckless promises. During the election, there were many promises of money to be spent on public services, policing and defence. I understand that the Budget has been put back from February to March, presumably to allow the Chancellor enough time to work out how those sums add up. Promises made during an election are not easily deliverable, but they can be held against a Government.

My major message to the Government is to caution against isolationism. Our departure from Europe, which I now, with deep regret, regard as inevitable, is happening just at the time when there is a renewed threat of global quasi-religious war, and when the threat of the destruction of the planet through climate change needs finally to be faced up to. Pulling out of Europe and moving to perhaps too close a relationship with the United States—particularly the regime there at present—means that we are moving away from international co-operation. On the one hand, we are isolating ourselves from Europe, or at least moving substantially away from it, and on the other we are undermining the degree to which Europe can affect progressive arguments and discussions on climate change and on other issues in the world as a whole.

I will quickly advise the Government against two other things. One is contempt for the Civil Service—whatever shortcomings it may have, we are still one of the best-governed countries in the world—and the other is contempt for Parliament. One of the effects of the redraft of the withdrawal Bill is to reduce scrutiny in this House and in another place of the developments on Brexit. That will prove to be a serious government mistake.

7 pm

Lord Dobbs (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to see that the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, has lost none of his fighting spirit in spite of the last few weeks.

For a generation, our foreign policy has been stuck on a road to nowhere—except Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, where all roads and good intentions seem to end. What is our policy? We disapprove of a regime, we want to show our displeasure, so we bomb and blast away, and then we go back to sleep with our consciences. It was supposed to make the streets of London safe for our own people. Yet a generation after the invasion of Iraq, we have not made the streets of London safe for our own people, and neither are the streets of Iraq safe, or anywhere else, come to that.

We are told that we are spreading parliamentary democracy. How we might spread democracy on the point of a bayonet is an interesting question, but it is one that remains unanswered, because we have so obviously failed. What we have done is pursue a policy of regime change, even though Tony Blair assured us

[LORD DOBBS]

that regime change is illegal. We got rid of Saddam Hussein, despite the fact that he had already destroyed his weapons of mass destruction. We also got rid of Muammar Gaddafi, even though he, too, with our support and encouragement, had destroyed his weapons of mass destruction. Your Lordships will remember: one was dragged from a hole in the ground and hanged, and the other was dragged from a sewer pipe and shot in the head. So it is not much of a surprise that Kim Jong-un seems rather disinclined to listen to our suggestion that it is now his turn to rid himself of his weapons of mass destruction. In his place, I would not either.

But we are not alone in these failures. The poor old EU's foreign policy is falling apart. China and Russia seem to see the EU as easy pickings. America ignores it. Our relations with Turkey are a complete catastrophe, even though it is far more important strategically than Syria. I am not suggesting that there are easy answers, but we do not even seem to want to ask the right questions.

What has gone wrong? Thirty years ago, the Cold War ended with scarcely a shot being fired, as the Iron Curtain was torn down. Then, we were a beacon of hope. Today, ask around the world, "What does Britain stand for?" They no longer know. We do not seem to know, either. Our voice is so uncertain, it is almost not heard. We pride ourselves on our values—of course we do—but what values, precisely? Despite the claims made earlier by the noble Baroness, Lady Ludford, we can scarcely claim that it is all about exporting liberal democracy. Our foreign policy has been neither liberal, nor has it shown anything very much to do with democracy. As we have heard time and again in this debate, we do not seem to have a strategy.

Hands up, I might be wrong about some of this. But if I am right about any of it, we really need to stop and think before simply stumbling on. We no longer run the world, but we can help build a better world—something we have not got close to these past two decades.

This is not a criticism of individuals; my noble friend Lord Ahmad is a very fine and totally tireless Foreign Minister, and in that he follows in the formidable footsteps of his predecessor, my noble friend Lady Anelay of St Johns. It is not a failure of individuals; this is a systemic failure, and it is deeply rooted.

I hope that your Lordships will forgive this dark analysis; I am an eternal optimist, and Britain has already moved on. Brexit means change, as the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, alluded to in his powerful speech this afternoon. Let us therefore embrace that change. Let us have a new national conversation and build a new foundation for our foreign policy. We have so many tools at our disposal: our language, our culture, our educational system, the Commonwealth, our alliances, our many, many friends—smart power, to which my noble friend Lord Howell, who sadly is not in his place, so often wisely refers.

Identify more clearly British interests, extend British influence and adapt our alliances. Threaten no one who does not threaten us. That might not be a bad start. Perhaps it is a good note to finish on.

7.06 pm

Lord Scriven (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Dobbs. I cannot believe that these words are coming out of my mouth, but on this occasion I agreed with much of what he said, which over the last two years has not been the case.

The key question is what will drive the UK's role and place in the world after we leave the EU. As the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, said—unfortunately, she is not in her place at the moment—it cannot just be based on a narrow agenda of trade. It has to be balanced with the environment, social justice and human rights.

Despite overtures made in the Queen's Speech to the language of human rights, the UK's proclaimed commitment to freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law appears not to extend to allied Governments in the Gulf. It is not just what you say but also what you do now and how we build on that that matters.

The UK provides Bahrain with a multi-million pound technical assistance fund—£5 million since 2012—without any accountability, and has routinely refused to disclose the beneficiaries or implementers of the programme. Since 2017, technical assistance has been channelled through the secretive Integrated Activity Fund, and the Government consistently refuse to disclose how this is spent. This is particularly concerning as technical assistance to Bahrain has failed to prevent significant rises in death sentences and executions, the restriction of freedom of expression and increased attacks against human rights defenders and dissidents.

Tomorrow, Bahraini death row inmates Mohammed Ramadhan and Hussein Moosa are due to receive a final verdict in a case review after their death sentences were overturned when evidence emerged indicating that they were brutally tortured into providing confessions. This appeal was granted only after it became evident that the UK-funded human rights oversight bodies had actively concealed evidence that the men were tortured, a position which the FCO initially refused to accept.

Britain's commitment to freedom of expression also appears to wane when it comes to our "friends" in the Gulf. Bahrain's most prominent human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, continues to languish in prison on a five-year sentence for criticising the Government on Twitter, after being denied a non-custodial sentence. Even Bahrainis abroad are not safe. The family of the UK-based human rights defender Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei have been targeted through torture and imprisonment in reprisal for his work. Similarly to Nabeel Rajab, Mr Alwadaei's mother-in-law, Hajer Mansoor, has repeatedly been denied an alternative sentence without justification and is currently being held in effective solitary confinement.

The UK has failed to take substantive action in each of these cases. Ministers have not only dismissed parliamentarians' concerns but have also relied on the assurances of the Bahraini Government and directed victims to the very oversight bodies—funded by the UK taxpayer—that have been complicit in whitewashing human rights abuses.

Furthermore, the Government have consistently failed to monitor effectively the human rights impacts of their support for Bahrain, both before and after the implementation of training programmes. While the FCO is legally mandated to perform an overseas security justice assistance assessment before providing any training, recent freedom of information requests indicate that on a number of occasions this has not been conducted. Equally, there is no evidence to suggest that the British Government have implemented measures to monitor the efficacy of this technical assistance to Bahrain, rendering it little more than a convenient illusion of reform.

I ask the Minister: when will the Government reveal how public money is being spent in Bahrain on this Integrated Activity Fund? How will the Government monitor the effectiveness of their programmes to ensure that taxpayers' money is not actively contributing to human rights abuses in Bahrain and the wider Gulf region? Before the Government talk about new powers on human rights and policy—as welcome as they are—they must start enacting existing policy to ensure that human rights abuses are not conducted when funded by British taxpayers' money.

If the UK is going to have real moral authority and be able to use its soft power effectively to make the world a better place, it will have to start doing so in a way that is more open and transparent. It will have to be more careful about who it chooses as friends and what it uses taxpayers' money for in trying to strengthen institutions abroad, and be more strident in standing up to those who abuse human rights, and not just follow trade deals as the first priority.

7.11 pm

Lord Krebs (CB): My Lords, in my brief contribution I will speak about climate change and the environment. I declare two interests, as a member of the advisory board of the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and as an independent adviser on sustainability to the energy company Drax.

I confess to having mixed feelings about the Government's agenda for climate change and the environment. On the positive side, I join my noble friend Lady Hayman in her delight at hearing the Minister referring to the two great challenges for the Government as climate change and biodiversity. I could not agree more. However, climate change and the environment only make an appearance in paragraph 13 out of 16 in the gracious Speech and occupy only 4% of the background briefing.

The real test will not be in what the Government say, but in what they do. As the Minister rightly said, COP 26 later this year is an opportunity for this country to show global leadership in tackling the climate crisis. However, as my noble friend Lord Hannay pointed out, we must show that we are doing what we have committed ourselves to do to tackle climate change in this country. Sadly, we are not.

On 18 December 2019, the chair and deputy chair of the Committee on Climate Change, the noble Lord, Lord Deben, and my noble friend Lady Brown of Cambridge, wrote to the Prime Minister, saying that "the UK's efforts to address the climate crisis have fallen short."

Although the Government will meet the first three carbon budgets, which are legally binding targets passed into law, they have no published plans for how to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, even though those have also been passed into law. Later this year, when the Committee on Climate Change publishes its sixth carbon budget, the Government will be even further adrift from their legal commitment to net zero by 2050.

When will the Government tell us how they will achieve the necessary cuts in emissions from buildings, transport—as my noble friend Lord Cameron of Dillington alluded to—and from industry and agriculture? When will they tell us how they intend to make the country more resilient to the inevitable impacts of climate change, including flooding, drought and high temperatures?

The Government have announced their plan to create a new watchdog, the office for environmental protection, which will, among other things, ensure that climate action is taken. However, as the noble Baronesses, Lady Sheehan and Lady Young of Old Scone, have mentioned, for this new office to be effective, it will need real teeth, be genuinely independent and be properly funded. As a minimum, it should have powers equivalent to the current EU system of imposing court fines on national Governments for failure to comply with legally binding standards.

Finally, I ask the noble Baroness the Minister for a clear response to the following question when she replies to the debate. Our biggest success story in reducing emissions is renewable energy generation through offshore wind. However, as we all know, wind cannot be relied on all the time, so the electricity supply system must have a back-up. A crucial part of this comes from the internal energy market, which enables us to buy gas and electricity on a spot market from other EU countries. I checked on my iPhone a few hours ago: at the moment, we are getting between 4% and 5% of our electricity from other European countries, notably France. After we have left the European Union, this internal energy market with no longer be available to us, as we are leaving the single market. Now 5% of our electricity supply may not sound very much, but to the 1.3 million homes that would not be able to turn on their light, their television, their electric kettle or their refrigerator, it is quite significant. How will the Government replace the electricity currently purchased through the internal energy market, and what will be the impact of this replacement on our carbon budget?

7.16 pm

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, today's world seems ever more precarious, with conflict and instability proliferating in so many places. Today, there are over 75 million displaced people in the world—more than at any time since World War II—with many trying to come to Europe. While we in the UK have spent much time looking inward, debating Brexit, this world has not become a safer place, as we have seen from the events in the Middle East this week.

I hope that Brexit will give Britain more opportunities for influence on the world stage. Although the UK is no longer a stand-alone military power, we more than

[BARONESS HODGSON OF ABINGER]

play our part through NATO, and the UK continues to be a world leader of soft power, promoting our values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. This is not a time for us to change our international approach, but rather to bolster our resources, to ensure that we have adequate defence spending to counter today's complex threats, invest more to strengthen our diplomatic service and continue to help the poorest across the world through UK aid, ensuring that developing countries can become more economically viable.

I draw your Lordships' attention to my registered interests when I say that as a country we should be particularly proud of what we have done to help women and girls across the world through highlighting the importance of gender equality and female empowerment internationally. There is still no country in the world with true gender equality, and the threat of violence is a daily reality for millions of women and girls. In virtually every country, they still face discrimination: they are more likely to be paid less, be denied their basic human and reproductive rights, be unable to access justice and carry the burden of unpaid care work. For most, gender equality remains a distant, impossible dream.

This is a landmark year. Not only is it five years since the launch of the SDGs, with the standalone goal on gender equality, but also it is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform for action, and the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the UN framework supporting women and girls affected by conflict. However, in spite of this resolution, women continue to be largely excluded from negotiating peace. Between 1992 and 2018, women constituted only 13% of negotiators, and only 4% of signatories in major peace processes. You cannot build peace by excluding half the population.

Appointing an ambassador for women, peace and security, as Canada has done, establishing a dedicated women, peace and security fund to support work on gender equality and implementing a national action plan would help enormously. We know that there is a global rollback on women and girls' rights and shrinking spaces for civil society, affecting the poorest and most marginalised the worst. So this is a year when the UK should be leading on highlighting these issues by helping to champion women in the poorest regions across the globe.

I was pleased to hear from my noble friend the Minister that we will continue to work in areas where we have already made progress such as girls' education, working to end the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children and in the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. These were always going to be marathons, not sprints, and it is vital that we do not lose focus due to the idiosyncrasies of our political system, but ensure that the mantle is passed from Minister to Minister.

Women particularly can be such powerful agents for change in their societies. I believe that the Government should provide dedicated, long-term, core, flexible funding for women's rights organisations working at grass roots. Last year saw the 40th anniversary of

CEDAW—the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women—known as the international bill of rights for women. How excellent it would be if, as one of the ways of celebrating this, the UK put forward a candidate for the CEDAW committee, which it has never done before. Will my noble friend confirm that that will happen?

Finally, I am concerned about rumours of rolling DfID back into the Foreign Office. Large, multifocused departments can be less effective. DfID has shown itself to be a world leader in aid delivery. We should be proud of its work and that we are the only G7 country with our commitment to 0.7% enshrined in law. UK aid helps to lift millions out of poverty across the world and tackles disease, terrorism and conflict, thus creating a safer, healthier and more prosperous world for us all. Let us not change what is not broken.

7.21 pm

Baroness Goudie (Lab): My Lords, I declare my interests as listed in the register and I congratulate my noble friend Lady Ritchie on her maiden speech earlier this afternoon.

We have an opportunity today in this House to look at the promises that the Government made in the Queen's Speech. It is for us to scrutinise that legislation and ensure that those promises are kept. I am a European. I am a child of Europe and I love Europe. I find it very difficult to say that we will no longer be in Europe, but, having accepted that decision, I am prepared to work hard with other people to repair whatever damage has been done between ourselves and other communities to ensure that we go forth in a much better way. At the same time, I am not prepared for us to give anything up. We must never give up.

I am reminded that it is the 25th anniversary of the events in Beijing. Women's rights are human rights and a lot has happened to women. We have moved back and we have moved forward, but in the present situation we are moving back very badly. When one of the partners that we are meant to be trading with, America, is not prepared to accept CEDAW or allow any of its funding to go towards supporting maternal rights in any country, and goes around the world trying to persuade other countries not to put funding into maternal rights and family planning, it is not the best way to be going forward. So I hope that when we do these trade deals with America we can put some pressure on there.

Also, America refuses to accept the International Criminal Court. I hope that we can take a look at that court in future, because it does not have a good record at all in terms of prosecutions on PSVI and other human rights. I sometimes wonder whether that court is worth being kept or whether we should look at something completely fresh. I hope that we can discuss that or put it on the agenda of the G7 or the G20 in the next year or two, because it is a bad institution.

On the G7, I hope that Britain will take a lead on the issues that it has taken a lead on before, but I am concerned about where the G20 is taking place. We know that Saudi Arabia has started to play games about women's rights and human rights. We know that that will be a plaster for only a few weeks, or a year or

so. I hope that Britain is not taken in, as other countries might be, at the G20, or at the W20, in which industry will be taking part.

On the foreign service and Ministry of Defence inquiries, I hope very much that we will strengthen these departments. We should encourage people to come and work for us, pay them and give much better facilities than they have previously had, and we should encourage them to stay and not be headhunted off after a couple of years. We need to have a defence department, diplomacy and a foreign service that really care. Embassies abroad should be serviced properly and should have the right staff who can take in everything, from DfID to trade and the position of people who need help—the whole gamut—and soft power. At the moment, less is happening in embassies than before.

On the whole question of DfID, I would like an undertaking from the ministry about what I read in this morning's *Daily Mail*, which you have to read to find out the Government's policy. The political editor, John Stevens, said:

“The foreign aid department will escape the axe”

of the Prime Minister's scaling back of the proposed Whitehall shake-up and the Prime Minister will largely concentrate instead on improving the Minister's performance. Now this newspaper constantly attacks foreign aid, however it comes, so I have a proposal to ensure that we continue giving foreign aid. Maybe we should have better governance over aid. At the moment the governance is quite good, but it could be much better. There should be better monitoring. Nothing should be without measurement, so if the monitoring were done better and there were more transparency between the NGOs, INGOs and other organisations that we give funding to, we would see a difference in the attacks by the extreme right, by newspapers and by programmes such as “Panorama”. We would then see a whole difference and people would understand why we are giving aid to these countries and the conditions that people are living under.

Also, if we do not educate girls and boys, the world will be in a much worse state than it is now. It is vital. So I would like to hear an undertaking not only that DfID will stay but that it will be strengthened and given much more respect from the outside world and the inside of Whitehall. I sometimes feel that DfID is the poor relation, in particular with the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence.

On those three departments, the issues of PSVI and girls' education both slip between departments, particularly PSVI. You cannot get decisions made because somebody is thinking, “Oh well, we will have to put this back or that back.” I hope that the conference in March will take place and that it will be more than a conference, and that Britain will come back to being the world leader that it was on this issue, and that the right sort of funding will be put in. The funding can be found. We must do this: it is absolutely vital.

On aid, my noble friend just mentioned that a large amount of aid goes to countries and is just given there, and then we find out four or five years later that it has been siphoned off by some member of the ruling family or something—I am sorry, I forgot the time. I was on my bandwagon.

7.28 pm

The Marquess of Lothian (Con): My Lords, with a new Government in place and at a time of severe international tension, it must be right to start looking for a new foreign policy, as whatever passed for one before stopped working a long time ago—no more so than in that traditional cauldron of the Middle East. After years of drift, of reacting to events and of sheltering in the afterburn of the United States, the time has come for a new foreign policy based on genuine strategic forward thinking. For the first time in years, we should seek a vision and a strategy of our own.

To begin with, we should formally eschew the use of targeted assassination as an instrument of foreign policy. What happened in Baghdad last week was ethically unacceptable. This was a foolhardy act of policy, which historical precedent teaches can lead to dramatic and dangerously unpredictable consequences. It was wrong and we should be no part of it.

We are already living with the consequences of a generation of misjudged and mismanaged adventures in the Middle East. Afghanistan 15 years on is still in bloody turmoil. After 14 years Iraq is still rocked by the aftershocks of violent civil war. After nine years, Libya is still racked by lethal division. Syria's insurgency is still suffering from ill-judged western interventions, including almost complicity with terrorists, and the Middle East peace process is inexorably sinking into the sand. It has been a litany of failure.

In nearly every case, we chose military intervention over dialogue, despite the fact that in Northern Ireland, after a quarter of a century of armed conflict and against very strong political opposition, we decided to try dialogue with our enemies instead. I was part of those initial tentative exploratory steps towards dialogue, and I saw it beginning to work. Yet genuine exploratory dialogue has been the absent component in nearly all the expensive failures of policy since then.

We need rapidly to change this. We should begin swiftly in Iran to seek again the common ground on which understanding might be built—we already have something to build on from the JCPOA negotiations of recent years—and if the US continues with its confrontational policy towards Iran, we should again have no part in it. From now on we must make our own judgments and take our own course. Our shared values will mean that more often than not we will be together, but that shall no longer be taken for granted, and I think that that is right. As our relative military clout regrettably continues to diminish, we should equip ourselves to be masters of dialogue, always prepared to explore, even with terrorists, the options for peace before supporting military action. A serious and much respected elderly Israeli statesman once told me that at his age he had learned that it was a better use of his time to talk to his enemies than to his friends. I hope that it is not too late for us to learn that lesson.

7.31 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on her maiden speech. I should declare at the outset that

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

I am a patron of Hong Kong Watch and visited Hong Kong in November to monitor the election and that last month I visited Kurdistan and northern Iraq.

Because of time constraints, I have given the Minister notice of several questions relating to Hong Kong, including evidence given in the House by Dr Darren Mann about attacks on and the arrest of medics there, which he says

“amount to grave breaches of international humanitarian norms and human rights law”,

the potential use of Magnitsky powers and a request for an assessment of the post-election situation in Hong Kong.

In the light of events in Iraq, I will use my few minutes mainly to speak about the role of Iran and the increasing belligerence and confidence of new insurgent militias. For 40 years, Iran has been responsible for proxy terrorism, hostage taking and egregious violations of human rights. Thousands of Iranians have long since seen through this theocratic terror state and have been publicly protesting against its leaders, while in Iraq more than 400 people have been killed while campaigning for a more open and democratic and less corrupt Government no longer manipulated by Iran.

Many people I met told me that Iranian Shia proxies and the re-emergent sleeping ISIS cells with Sunni affiliations will ruthlessly oppose any change and endanger the remarkable achievements of the Kurdish Regional Government, who have valiantly protected both Kurds and the minorities. In the north of Iraq, especially in Irbil, the KRG, whose parliamentary Speaker and Deputy Speaker I met, have created a glimpse of what a peaceful Iraq and a wider region respectful of difference and diversity could look like. I visited some of the multi-ethnic villages being rebuilt on the Nineveh plain, but Iran has already mobilised Shabak proxies, endangering the reconstruction of ancient Yazidi and Christian settlements such as Bartella, and is trying to create a destabilising Iranian canton strategically wedged between Kurdistan and Mosul. The parallel re-emergence of ISIS in northern Iraq's Hamrin and Qara Chokh mountains led, in December, to the deaths or injury of more than 30 brave Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers, while its ISIS affiliate in Nigeria beheaded 11 Christians in retaliation for the demise of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The signal failure of the international community to bring genocidaires such as Baghdadi or men such as Qasem Soleimani to justice or to challenge countries that arm proxies or bomb civilians creates a culture of impunity and erodes a rules-based international order. I saw the consequences of impunity at Bardarash refugee camp where, in increasingly cold weather, tents and makeshift shelters in a desolate location have replaced homes bombed by Turkish—that is, NATO—planes. Thousands of people who, until weeks before, had successfully supported themselves and their children, now queue up for rations, handouts and medical help. In Bardarash, a mother of four told me that, “As they dropped their bombs and chemicals many children were burnt. Some were killed. I just want to go home with my children, but everything was destroyed, and we would be slaughtered.”

When did it become acceptable to break the Geneva conventions, and potentially the Chemical Weapons Convention, illegally occupy territory, ethnically cleanse

a population and face no investigation, little censure, no Security Council resolution and no consequences? What outrage must a NATO country commit before we declare it to be unfit for membership let alone seek its referral to the International Criminal Court?

If the rule of law is a casualty of international impotence, consider the phenomenal human consequences. A staggering 70 million people have been forcibly displaced, with 37,000 people forced to flee their homes every single day, while 17 years is the average length of time spent in a camp by a refugee. These camps are the perfect recruiting grounds for the exploitation of despair, hopelessness and betrayal. Bardarash is a symbol of the breakdown of global leadership.

In asking the Minister how we intend to fill this vacuum, I would also welcome her response to questions I have sent her about memorialising the Simele genocide site and the request of Baba Sheikh, the spiritual leader of the Yazidis, who I met, concerning the 3,000 still-missing Yazidi women. Genocide survivors from Mosul and Sinjar told me that they had never been approached by British or international agencies to give their evidence. How will trials ever take place if we fail systematically to collect witness statements?

There can be no lasting peace and reconciliation without justice and the rule of law, which is why a central plank of our approach must be the creation of a regional court to try those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. Until we do, I echo the noble Marquess, Lord Lothian, when I say that lawless militias and proxies will go on behaving with impunity and retaliatory assassinations and killings will be the order of the day, with unpredictable consequences for people who have already experienced appalling suffering and persecution.

7.37 pm

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con): My Lords, it is always a privilege to follow the noble Lord. I draw the attention of the House to my entries in the Register of Members' Interests, particularly as a trustee of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and president of the Colne Valley Regional Park.

The general election result has given us a welcome degree of certainty, and the gracious Speech has outlined some measures that are to be welcomed. The international situation is, of course, giving us all a great deal of concern.

The environment has rightly risen up the political agenda dramatically over the past 12 months, reflecting real public awareness of the gravity of the potential disaster facing our planet on many levels. I was very pleased to hear my noble friend Lord King of Bridgwater mention population. As he said, it is something we rarely discuss. We cannot but be appalled at the severity of the situation with the fires in Australia, and we must not forget that other precious places are on fire, notably the Amazon. While we are looking at the world, we must not forget about our own nature and biodiversity. The UK has overseas territories that are incredibly rich in diverse nature ranging from the Indian Ocean to the South Atlantic and from the Caribbean to Gibraltar. They are every bit as much of our biodiversity as the Chilterns or the Cairngorms. In

fact, they have more diversity. We must not let them remain the Cinderella of the UK's guardianship of nature, because they are our crown jewels.

The gracious Speech contains much ambition, but it will be up to Parliament to ensure that noble ambitions are turned into real, positive action. I do not doubt the genuine aspirations, but I am concerned that a certain amount of watering down might occur. This, I am afraid to say, is based on experience in various jobs that I have held, most recently in No. 10 as a special adviser. Enshrining the 25-year environment plan, launched by the then PM, Theresa May, will be paramount for our country. We must not let this opportunity pass. We must make it a real, meaningful change to the way we treat our nature, which we all enjoy and depend on for our very lives in so many ways.

One thing that I believe is of paramount importance is real, meaningful funding for both Natural England and the Environment Agency. I know that whenever we have these debates there is a request for more funding, but I have seen the funding for those two agencies go down. It is incredibly important that we give them the resources that they are desperately starved of, as both can provide the expertise and enforcement role that they should be offering. I was delighted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the environment would be a priority in the Budget. We shall see.

There will be ample opportunity during the legislative process to strengthen, if necessary, this landmark legislation, and today we have heard of several examples of where we have to ensure that that happens. We will be hosting the climate COP in Glasgow, and as hosts we must set an example to other nations. Therefore, I cannot understand how we can contemplate any further expansion of aviation. The plans to create what is ostensibly a second airport at Heathrow must be axed, not just for emission reasons but because clean air is a human right. I will be looking closely at the Private Member's Bill on clean air which the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Moulsecoomb, is bringing to the House next week. I hope that suitable measures on air quality will be incorporated in the Environment Bill if those measures are not already in place.

As we have already heard from my noble friend Lord Patten, in particular, and the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, there was something of a bidding war on tree planting during the election campaign, and planting the right species in the right place is of course very important. However, it seems the most utter madness that, while we are advocating the planting of more trees, HS2 is embarking on the biggest deforestation scheme since the First World War. Normally I do not encourage the culling of wildlife, but that particular white elephant should be put down humanely before it tramples down more in its terrible path. The opportunities for expansion of our rail system are not best served by this scheme, as expertly argued by the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, in the past few days. While we are speaking today, I have heard of the eviction of people in Harvil Road, while people try to ensure that the water supplies are not contaminated.

We are leaving the European Union. We have an opportunity to be among the best and most enlightened in Europe, and I urge the Government to be bold and grasp this opportunity with enthusiasm.

7.42 pm

Lord Truscott (Ind Lab): My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, on her excellent maiden speech. I should also like to say that I agree heartily with the noble Lord, Lord Randall, on HS2.

The gracious Speech raised many important issues but was tantalisingly vague on the details. We now have some understanding of the country's future direction under Tsar Boris. Thus we will have a free trade agreement with the EU, although the deadline is very challenging. The commitment to net zero greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 is welcome, together with legally binding targets. However, as the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, said, much remains to be done.

Similarly welcome is the commitment to spend 2% of national income on defence, although that includes pension provisions. I note the reservations of the noble Lord, Lord West of Spithead, on that. I also applaud the promise to undertake an

"Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review"

to reassess the nation's place in the world post Brexit. This should help the Government to work out how, in their own words, they can

"promote and expand the United Kingdom's influence in the world."

There has been much talk of a "global Britain" foreign policy. What does that mean? How would you define it? For too long there has been a disconnect between the UK's foreign and security policy, as though each operates in different spheres. However, with an incoherent foreign policy it is difficult to design a security policy that should underpin it. As the Chilcot report pointed out, embarking on a foreign intervention without a clear plan or endgame is extremely dangerous. The same holds true for any conflict with Iran. Foreign policy should outline a country's objectives, and only then can a security policy be framed to help achieve them.

British foreign policy since the Second World War has largely been contracted out to the United States as the ultimate security policy, yet at a time when US policy is itself incoherent—witness climate change and the Paris accord; Iran and the Middle East peace process; Syria and the Kurds, which we have recently heard about; world trade and so on—it is time for the UK to start thinking for itself. The security, defence and foreign policy review allows time for a rethink. Should the emphasis be on a global role east of Suez, using our two hugely expensive aircraft carriers to project British power in the Pacific, or should we focus on security threats nearer to home?

As foreign affairs and defence spokesperson in the European Parliament, I remember leading the response to the 1998 SDR under the then Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson—now a Member of your Lordships' House. As we heard earlier in his incisive speech, he very much led that process. It was a serious review that laid out the path for British defence for over a decade. We have a chance to do the same, this time seeing where the country should be by 2030.

The UK's defence equipment budget will have a £15 billion shortfall over the next decade, and projects such as the aircraft carriers and proposed Tempest stealth fighter jet will take a chunk of that. However, with modern warfare evolving, including the use—

Lord West of Spithead: On the point about the aircraft carriers, as I mentioned, they have now been paid for, so they will not take a huge chunk of the budget. I just want to make that clear.

Lord Truscott: I appreciate that. They cost £6.5 billion and that has been covered, but there will obviously be operational costs and we have yet to kit out the aircraft carriers with aircraft, which will bring an additional cost. However, I note what the noble Lord says.

With modern warfare evolving, including the use of armed drones and hypersonic missiles, which will have an impact on the ability of the aircraft carriers to defend themselves, let alone issues such as hybrid warfare and non-armed conflict, is this the best use of taxpayers' money? Arguably, the fight against climate change and for energy and water security carries far greater security risks than conventional warfare. Cyber threats grow by the day, and artificial intelligence can be a force for good or bad. More joined-up government thinking would help, and certainly a review of the Department for International Development and its role is long overdue.

Finally, the Government announced that they would stand firm against those who threaten our values. I presume that that meant China, Iran, Russia and North Korea. Apart from possible sanctions, it is not obvious how that might be achieved. It is not a war we are clearly winning. History has not yet ended with the victory of liberal democracies.

I finish with one interesting fact. A survey by the *Journal of Democracy* found that in the land of the free only 30% of US millennials agree that it is "essential" to live in a democracy. That means that 70% of US millennials do not think that it is essential to live in a democracy. The struggle for hearts and minds should never be forgotten, and winning that war is our best defence.

7.48 pm

Lord Risby (Con): My Lords, as we depart the European Union, we should remind ourselves that in wide areas of mutual activity we have created structures that have enabled us to co-operate effectively with our neighbours on matters such as migration, aid, defence and security—that is certainly to the fore at the moment—and also mutual recognition of qualifications. I very much hope that that will continue, to our mutual benefit.

However, as has also been mentioned by other noble Lords, we have seen our soft power work very well over many years, and that includes the British Council, the BBC overseas service, Chevening scholarships and the English language. We are an open society and we have an incorruptible judiciary. However, as we chart our own new course, I find it perplexing that our Foreign and Commonwealth Office enjoys such meagre funding, past and projected. I hope that the Budget will begin to address the new realities of this matter.

There have been some announcements and discussion about forming a specific government body which would strategically embrace defence, trade, overseas aid and the Foreign Office. I hope that my noble friend the Minister can inform us further about this. Again, this

is exactly the right time to be achieving such a structure. It should be a great source of pride to us that we have such a generous, well-regarded and focused overseas aid and development programme. Yet, in my view, there is some disproportionality in this. Out of a total managed government expenditure of some £840 billion promoting our national interest in countries abroad, even with some ODA funding, we have a budget of just £1.1 billion. This is, of course, a fraction of what we commit to overseas aid and development. I am not suggesting that the functions are to be aligned, but it seems disproportionate as we look to the future.

In the past, our economy has been less export-oriented than many others, but huge and imaginative efforts have recently been made to promote trade and investment. I happen to be one of the Prime Minister's trade envoys. All of us work very closely with our embassies abroad, and I have seen how British companies, even small and medium-sized enterprises, are being vigorously encouraged to enter overseas markets with a substantial increase in UK export finance provision. The results are frankly impressive, springing from a new professionalism which has been developed in the last few years.

However, many of your Lordships will know something very important: our visa system needs urgent reassessment. It is all too often hit and miss. Our ambassadors, almost uniquely and all too often, have very limited discretion, which causes acute embarrassment at times, even to those who hold diplomatic passports. Important foreign individuals and officials often wish to come here to examine our incentives and flexible employment policies, which have spurred on our admirable start-up rates, especially in the sphere of technology and particularly as we are so committed now to sharing our experience and expertise with them. This is something I have witnessed often, but I have to say that, frequently, ambassadors are left saying silent prayers as visa applications are submitted because the system is so erratic.

This month, we will see the fruits of some productive interdepartmental co-operation at the UK-Africa Investment Summit in London, with attendance at the highest level. I applaud the emphasis on Africa that is now taking place, with huge challenges, including some dreadful situations of famine and the effects of climate change, but with huge opportunities too. We can share our expertise with our friends in Africa; people are coming at a high level to increase their prosperity, and we can open up opportunities for ourselves.

I conclude by saying that the Prime Minister has rightly called for us to move on from what has seemed at times over the last few years to be a very unhappy period in our long history. It is now incumbent on us to support fully those who, directly or indirectly, are forging our new relationships, and all too often in need of our fulsome praise and gratitude.

7.54 pm

Lord Judd (Lab): My Lords, I join those who have congratulated my new noble friend Lady Ritchie on her outstanding maiden speech. Her counsels will be very important to us all in the events that lie ahead in the immediate future. I declare an interest as someone deeply involved in a number of NGOs working in the

sphere that we are debating. There is no difference among us in acknowledging that General Soleimani was a cruel, calculating and brutal leader; no one laments his departure. However, the question is not whether his departure is a good thing. The question is: what will be the consequences of the manner of his departure?

We have spent all the years since the Second World War striving with our American friends to build up a system of collective security, international responsibility and human rights, as a cornerstone of stability and justice. Of course there have been immense mistakes and setbacks, but they have been part of the whole struggle of our people together. President Trump's flat-footed, insensitive, impetuous action in the Middle East has set that all back by decades. This is a moment to regroup and stand firm. We must retain the friendship of the American people. Our history is deeply involved with theirs, going right back—as we should be celebrating again this year—to the Pilgrim Fathers, whatever the chequered stories that followed, as well as to the First and Second World Wars and the huge sacrifices made by the American people for the freedom of Europe. That must never be forgotten. They are our friends and we must work with them.

However, we must not fall into the trap of saying that this means we have to follow the diktats and lines of the present President. That is quite a different question. There comes a time in friendship when candour is crucial. It is time to say to our American friends, whatever they may be feeling—and goodness knows there are debates raging within the USA itself—that enough is enough. We cannot afford the policies and techniques that the President is following.

I found some of the words of the Minister, when he introduced this debate, mildly encouraging; it is not the first time that I have been persuaded by the rhetoric of the noble Lord. The question is what must happen to ensure that we stand firm, as is necessary.

So many other matters should be covered in this debate; I will mention a couple. Climate change is intimately related to security. Let us look at global migration and at the effects on the global economy. It is inconceivable that in the new approach to security policy—which we all want to see—these dimensions should be lacking. It is also crucial that we recognise that scrutiny of the detail of trade deals, not least with the United States itself, is vital for security. We cannot afford the consequences if things go wrong in trade deals, where elements of the deals detract from the very objectives that we are trying to achieve in fulfilment of our values.

As we go into the future, we will need scrutiny as never before, starting with Parliament but extending beyond it. We have a vital, vibrant civil society in Britain of which we should be proud. That civil society must be engaged and must feel a sense of ownership in whatever emerges.

7.59 pm

Lord Sheikh (Con): My Lords, Her Majesty in her most gracious Speech reiterated this Government's ambitious plans in the field of international relations. Many of the challenges facing the global community cannot be addressed in the absence of effective diplomacy.

I recently visited Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where I spoke about the importance of diplomacy. I wholeheartedly welcome the United Kingdom-Uzbekistan partnership and co-operation agreement. This is the first PCA signed by Her Majesty's Government with a central Asian country. The agreement facilitates broad co-operation in trade and investment, sustainable development, environmental protection, energy and human rights. The *Economist* magazine recently named Uzbekistan country of the year in recognition of the many positive developments made in the country. Noble Lords will be aware that Uzbekistan shares a border with Afghanistan and has been a reliable partner in combating terrorism and drug and human trafficking. I ask the Minister to inform your Lordships' House whether the Government have any plans for further co-operation in these areas. Are there any plans to appoint a trade envoy for Uzbekistan?

I have spoken on several occasions, and led a debate in your Lordships' House, on the importance of the Commonwealth. I shall speak particularly on one Commonwealth country: Sri Lanka. Britain has vibrant Sri Lankan communities which have made enormous contributions to this country. Sri Lanka's location at the heart of the Indian Ocean means it is uniquely positioned to serve as a regional centre for trade and services. The World Bank has recently classified Sri Lanka as an upper middle-income country. FTAs are in place with India, Pakistan and Singapore. Comprehensive trade agreements are also being negotiated with China, Thailand and Bangladesh. It is worth noting that businesses based in Sri Lanka can market their products and services to 3.5 billion people on preferential terms. Through the Port City Colombo project, Sri Lanka is creating a new international financial centre that will function under its own jurisdiction. Will the Government be providing expertise or facilitating the adoption of an English legal framework for this region? I would like to see us investing more in Sri Lanka and expanding our trade with that country.

I turn to a country that has faced massive upheaval but has enormous potential: Sudan. I have visited Sudan on three occasions. As Omar al-Bashir has been deposed, the UK and the international community should endeavour to build a meaningful relationship with the country to achieve peace and foster harmony among the people with a democratic and prosperous future. There must of course be efforts to ensure respect for human rights. I therefore commend the Sudan peace talks that were held in Juba recently, organised by the troika that includes us, the United States and Norway. I hope that all interested stakeholders will work together to ensure that all the negotiations have positive results, which is what the people of Sudan deserve and expect.

Sudan is in a region where its neighbours face civil or political unrest. Sudan's neighbour Libya is a transit route for illegal migration, human trafficking and terrorism. We need to work with Sudan to establish security in the region and combat terrorism and radicalisation. I would like to see us working closely with Sudan in helping it to build its agricultural and mining sectors. It was Lord Kitchener who established the University of Khartoum, following the death of General Gordon. We should therefore make efforts to

[LORD SHEIKH]

build closer educational ties between universities in Sudan and in the UK. I ask the Minister: how can we strengthen our relationship with Sudan and assist that country in a positive way?

As we prepare for our imminent departure from the European Union, it is vital that we resurrect and strengthen economic and diplomatic relationships across the globe.

8.05 pm

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, I will speak about Turkey and Syria, starting from 2013, when three left-wing Kurdish women were assassinated in a Paris apartment. No one has been charged with that crime, but everything points to Turkish state responsibility. Early in 2015, the Dolmabahçe agreement could have ended 30 years of Kurdish insurgency in Turkey but instead the President tore it up, thus provoking the failed coup d'état of 2016. Turkey, however, deserves credit for hosting more Syrian refugees than any other country. By contrast, it provided arms and medical treatment for the most extreme Islamist factions.

In 2014 and 2015, the Turkish army stood by, looking on while ISIS destroyed the frontier town of Kobane, which was saved only by American air support. Since then, Turkey has seized three slices of Syria: first, around Jarabulus, then Afrin province, and last year a 50-mile strip along the frontier of Jazira—all this with no UN approval or consultation with NATO, using as paid allies Islamist fighters who have killed civilians and raped and extorted, as we can see from the death of one woman MP in Syria and the killing of Rezan Sido and four friends, reported by Agence France-Presse on 6 December. It is no wonder that 200,000 people were displaced and some 4,000 killed in an attack that saw white phosphorus used on civilians.

I must ask why HMG did not call for a compulsory and verified ceasefire in both Jazira and Idlib. What is their response to Turkey's new claim to an undue share of Mediterranean gas and oil at the expense of Greece and Cyprus in particular? With this claim goes the recruiting of yet more Islamists to fight in Libya. How have our Government replied to the damning report of 20 December by the UN Assistant Secretary-General, Ursula Mueller?

After eight years of war in Syria and chaos in Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan and Libya, our Government have lost much of the influence that they once had. Dialogue is essential, as was pointed out by the noble Marquess, Lord Lothian, in the Gulf region, both across it and within it. It should start unofficially and continue formally. Have the Government budgeted for dialogue in the region? Will they also reconsider their approach to British jihadis, especially to their widows and orphans, and rethink their failure to have any representation at all in Damascus?

I have raised these issues previously, but they have been rejected, I am sorry to say. I will keep coming back to them. If one surveys the ruins of British and American policies in so much of the Middle East, it seems clear that second thoughts and new ideas are urgently needed, if only because of the unusual demography and deep discontent that exist there.

8.10 pm

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on her interesting and thoughtful maiden speech.

The gracious Speech confirmed that the Government's priority is to achieve Brexit at the end of this month. Even the most ardent remainers now accept that it will happen, and that it will be a real Brexit. The strong mandate given by the voters to the Prime Minister and the manifesto on which the new House of Commons has been elected make it abundantly clear that the constant pleading by the remain lobby that the people did not know what they were voting for in 2016, and so the result of the referendum should be discounted or diminished in importance, was complete fiction.

I normally agree with the wise contributions to your Lordships' House made by the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, but in his remarks on voting share in the general election, he did not include the point that 78.4% of the electorate did not vote for the Labour Party. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats, those strong proponents of proportional representation, should take note that the 100 seats they occupy in your Lordships' House overrepresent their share of the vote by 63%.

There never was any point at all in half leaving the EU, such as would have been the case if a so-called soft Brexit had been pursued. I am delighted that we will properly leave the EU and regain our freedoms to make our own laws and regulations, which may or may not be the same as those adopted by the EU, but which will be those that we consider most appropriate for our businesses and our people, providing necessary protections to consumers and workers, while not encumbering businesses with red tape which may protect businesses in other European countries but does nothing to assist British entrepreneurs and innovators as they respond to the new opportunities open to them as Britain resumes its place as an independent country on the global stage.

The election result also permits a start to be made in rebuilding the trust and confidence formerly held by the public in our political institutions. The obstruction by another place of the people's decision to leave the EU aided, abetted and encouraged by your Lordships' House, is the reason why Parliament has come to be held in such low regard by the people. I am happy that the process of recovery has already started, given the clear and decisive direction in which the Government have moved since the election, as articulated in

"the most radical Queen's Speech in a generation"—[*Official Report, Commons, 19/12/19; col. 44.*]

to deliver on the priorities of the British people, in the Prime Minister's words.

I welcome the Government's statement regarding the Trade Bill. To build opportunities for businesses and maximise the future prosperity of our citizens, we need our own independent trade policy. In his uplifting introductory speech, my noble friend Lord Gardiner gave me some comfort that the Government's sights are set a little higher than their paper on the Queen's Speech suggests. The paper lists four principal elements of the Trade Bill. They are all entirely sensible and

necessary, but they are defensive and have more to do with preserving our present trading arrangements and protecting British firms against unfair practices than with setting out an exciting new trading strategy for the country after Brexit. The negotiation of our future trade relationship with the EU is of paramount importance, but it is also important to start negotiations with our other major trading partners. I was delighted to hear the Minister confirm that the Government intend to start these quickly. This will doubtless assist our negotiating position with the EU.

In addition to this, I believe it is of enormous importance for our independent trade policy and our geostrategic place in the world that we should, as soon as possible, indicate formally our intention to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Since the withdrawal of the United States, Japan has provided much of the leadership of the CPTPP, six of whose 11 members are Commonwealth countries. The CPTPP could thus provide basic trade agreements quickly with 11 countries on the basis already negotiated in detail by the present members, while negotiations on deeper bilateral agreements proceed in tandem with Japan, Australia and others, which may take longer to finalise. The Japanese and Australian Governments have both on several occasions indicated their positive stance towards UK accession to the CPTPP. Again, I believe that an early application for accession by the UK would strengthen our position in EU trade negotiations.

8.16 pm

Lord Ravensdale (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as an engineer in the energy industry and as director of the cross-party group Peers for the Planet. It was most welcome to hear in the gracious Speech the Government's specific commitment to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. There is a vast canvas of challenges that the Government need to think about to meet that target, so I will focus on a few key issues for our future energy system.

The 2050 energy system scenario of the Committee on Climate Change has two key elements: variable renewables—for example, offshore wind—and low-carbon baseload or firm power. There is a fairly low risk with renewables in that, if we keep on with our current build rate, we will get to where we need to be by 2050. However, there are significant risks with provision of the low-carbon firm power. The Committee on Climate Change recognises that we need firm power, and lots of it, to counter the intermittent nature of renewables and ensure that we have an economically viable overall energy system. There are two options for that firm power: nuclear, or gas turbines with carbon capture and storage—we need both.

I will make three overall points. First, carbon capture and storage is absolutely central to the net-zero scenario of the Committee on Climate Change, which envisages capturing around 176 megatonnes, or million tonnes, per year of carbon dioxide by 2050. That massive number is not even the main issue; it is that our capture capacity today is precisely zero. The technology itself is well understood but there are many uncertainties on cost and systems integration—between extraction, transport and storage of CO₂—and the amount of CO₂

that can be captured, the capture rate of the technology on a large scale. This is why we urgently need a carbon capture and storage demonstrator project to start deployment of that technology in this decade. Failure to provide CCS could be the single biggest risk in achieving the net-zero target. Can the Minister provide more detail on the scope of the plans to provide a carbon capture and storage cluster in the UK and the timescales involved?

Secondly, on nuclear, the key issue here is pricing and affordability. Government and industry need to do much more to reduce the cost of the technology. The key routes to doing that are looking at the finance model—the regulated asset base funding model that is being investigated is one of those—repeatability, namely producing the same design of plants over and over again and getting the efficiency gains from that; and, finally, technological innovation, for example modular build, which we are seeing in the proposals for small modular reactors. All those provide a route to getting to the £60 per-megawatt-hour level which we need for the technology.

I believe new nuclear is essential for zero-carbon emissions by 2050; it is the only mature option for low-carbon firm power generation, and an urgent refresh of plans is required to increase nuclear capacity in the UK. After recent pauses and cancellations, we have only a single new nuclear project under construction in the UK. Can the Minister update the House on the actions the Government will take to increase new nuclear capacity in the UK?

Thirdly, we need to think about management and governance of the energy system as a whole because having the rapid period of change, and added complexity in the system, to achieve zero by 2050 is unprecedented. There have long been calls for an independent energy system architect, whose purpose would be to look at that system as a whole and flexibly deliver the optimum system for zero by 2050. Those arguments were developed in a report of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee back in March 2015. The Government should revisit this really important idea because business as usual will not be sufficient to deliver this incredibly complex system.

Others have made the case much better than I could on why we are pursuing this, particularly in the powerful contributions of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford and my noble friend Lady Hayman. Now we need to focus on the how.

8.20 pm

Baroness Hooper (Con): My Lords, in the short time available in this wide-ranging debate, I wish to focus on Latin America. Last year I had the privilege of attending, as the Government's special envoy, the inauguration of three new Presidents following fair and free elections in June in El Salvador, in July in Panama and in December in Argentina. President Bukele of El Salvador, at 37 the youngest President in the Americas, faces huge challenges but is determined to ensure that El Salvador should be a country in which people wish to live, remain and invest rather than looking north and emigrating. President Laurentino Cortizo of Panama seeks to increase Panama's strategic geographical advantages by also ensuring good

[BARONESS HOOPER]

governance, rule of law, a competitive economy and inequality reduction. President Alberto Fernández of Argentina, in spite of references to sovereignty in the south Atlantic in his inaugural speech, seemed to me a person we can do business with to pursue many of the initiatives currently in place.

All three new Presidents expressed to me their hope and wish to increase and improve relations with the United Kingdom. The good will expressed in those three countries exists throughout Latin America, from Mexico through central America and down to the tip of Patagonia. In part, this is because of the historic support that Great Britain gave some 200 years ago for its independence movements. That support may be not thought of much here but is well remembered throughout the region. In part, it is also because the United Kingdom has always been seen as a solid, stable and dependable country, with values to be relied upon. There is tremendous respect for our institutions; I only hope that recent events have not diminished this view too much. But I also hope that we take advantage of these favourable signals because the opportunities for trade and investment, and for co-operation and partnership in Latin America, are considerable.

In the field of education, for example, it is not just about the teaching of English and the links between universities and other educational institutions. There is also enormous scope for our education supplies industry. On renewable energy, as my noble friend the Minister said in opening and as the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, has just said, we can contribute much from our knowledge and expertise. We can also learn because Brazil, for example, has made huge strides with biomass energy through ethylene being used not only to heat homes but to fly aeroplanes. There is plenty of scope on climate change, with Colombia and Brazil being the most biodiverse countries in the world while Amazonia provides the lungs of the world—that is, not just Brazil but Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. Antarctica also gives us great scope for research and scientific co-operation. The launch of the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly in London last September to help co-ordinate research is an important step forward. In Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, as another example, the Charles Darwin Foundation is currently celebrating its 70th anniversary with great success.

The late Lord Davidson founded Canning House in 1948 because he understood that the British Empire was coming to an end, and had the foresight to recognise that we had to find a new role in the world. Canning House continues to work to fulfil this role and I am proud to be a former president, and currently a vice-president, of it. George Canning famously said 200 years ago:

“I called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old.”

Those words seem very appropriate for us today.

Latin America is still the new world and it behaves the old world—that is, us in Europe and this country in particular—to see its countries on our priority list, especially when we think of the competition, in that respect, of China. In spite of the fact that there was no

direct reference to Latin America in the Queen's Speech I hope that my noble friend the Minister, who has a mammoth task in winding up this debate, will be able to give me some reassurance and encouragement that Latin American countries and the region as a whole are firmly in our focus in post-Brexit Britain.

8.26 pm

Lord Glenarthur (Con): My Lords, I want to concentrate my remarks on some rather narrower defence issues, moving away from deep foreign policy and defence issues, which have been well touched on today. We are given to understand that the Army is some 8,000 short of its manning target, due partly to recruiting difficulties and partly to lack of retention. Can my noble friend say what proportion of this figure, if it is correct, applies to the Regular Army and what proportion to the Army Reserve? We hear all kinds of reasons being given for the shortage: lack of fitness; lack of educational qualifications; turbulence; unwillingness to deploy, which is surely what the Armed Forces are for; family issues; and even the state of military housing. I want to dwell particularly on the last of these, relating to the defence estate in Scotland.

It is my understanding that more than 1,000 military homes in Scotland lie empty, a figure up several hundred from 2013. Is this figure correct and, if so, why should it be? What state are those houses in? Are they habitable? Are they maintained? Are they up to the accepted current standards of energy performance certification? If the houses are to remain empty, has any consideration been given to alternative uses for them that can perhaps be associated with past military use? Might they not be used to house, under whatever circumstances can be arranged, veterans, particularly perhaps those who have disabilities? There would be a cost implication of any adaptation necessary, which would fall to the Scottish Government to fund, but improvements in the EPC standards of those houses would seem to be an MoD responsibility to address weaknesses in its current Scottish housing stock if it is still on its books.

The upgrading of all properties in Scotland to EPC level C was one of the few Conservative-led and costed energy policies in Scotland which the SNP was initially against but for which cross-party support has now been achieved. The work necessary to achieve suitable upgrades of MoD housing would give an economic boost through delivering job opportunities and spending in rural areas.

Like my noble friend on the Front Bench, I live in Scotland and am very aware of the various dimensions of Scottish politics which impinge on our daily lives, but here we have a subject where the responsibilities seem to be shared. Improving Scottish MoD housing stock from Westminster sources would be an example of Scottish Conservative policies in action and, with its economic and social benefits, perhaps even give a taste of what a change in government in Holyrood in 2021 might look like.

After her many years deeply involved in Scottish politics and now with MoD ministerial responsibilities, I am sure that my noble friend Lady Goldie will understand the broader political point that I am making. She might accept also that we cannot allow military-owned

houses to lie empty, inadequately insulated or in a state of poor repair, whatever the technicalities of their ownership. They should be put to full and imaginative use either for the military, for the veterans or, with suitable adaptation, for those with disabilities. They should not be left to rot.

8.30 pm

Lord Crisp (CB): My Lords, I will speak principally about the trade opportunities for the UK in health and health science, but I will also recognise the important work in health done by DfID and touch on the Government's desire to be

"a force for good in the world."

The UK is a world leader in health and health science and can strengthen that position still further in the coming months. Five years ago, the APPG on Global Health, which I co-chair, published a comprehensive report which mapped out the UK's contribution to health globally. It showed that we are a leader in the four big sectors of: academia—by which I mean research and professional education; commercial activity, which is life sciences; government action through DfID and the NHS; and our great NGO sector. Overall, if we map out the UK's entire contribution to health and health improvement globally, we see that we come second only to the US and beat it in some areas of research on some measures.

We will publish a follow-up, post-Brexit report at the end of this month. It shows that the UK's position has strengthened in the past five years in many areas with, for example, a new life sciences strategy—a sector that is expanding very quickly, with a turnover of £74 billion; massively increased investment in research; importantly, new regional groupings outside the golden triangle of Oxford, Cambridge and London, in the north, Scotland, Wales and the south-west, which are linking NHS institutions and the great universities in those areas to develop more products and more research for the world; and recent ratings which show that we have the two top universities in the world and other ratings showing that we have three of the five best universities for medicine in the world, the best science journal in *Nature* and two of the four top medical journals in the *Lancet* and the *BMJ*. We also have enormous influence globally on health; for example, through tackling antimicrobial resistance and through international development. This is an impressive story.

These improvements are due in part to the very positive action taken by the Government as well as by health and science leaders in all parts of the UK. Of course, the one negative area is the risks associated with Brexit, of severing ties with European institutions and losing out on those research funds, and the difficulties in recruiting and retaining scientists and health workers. These are real risks, but if they can be managed successfully—I am being very positive about this in this speech—the scope for trade and exports from this sector, as well as increased influence and soft power, is truly enormous.

Our forthcoming report will call for the Government to work with health and science leaders to develop the UK as a truly global centre for health and health sciences—if you like, a go-to place for all aspects of

health globally. I believe the timing for this is perfect. Health is the fastest-growing sector globally; science and technology promise new breakthroughs and the UK is very well placed, with its research base, to take advantage of them. However, this will require vision, leadership, investment and greater co-ordination to capture some of the synergies between these different sectors, as well as dealing with the risks I talked about and a whole host of issues, including the difficulty of getting visas for foreign scientists and others coming into this country, as mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Risby.

If we get this right, the gains will be both financial and—vital in today's dangerous world—in terms of greater UK influence, as well as our commitment to achieving health for all and our work in international development. It is not always apparent that this is also about sustaining high standards globally in science and business, which the UK upholds very forcefully; in other words, this is a demonstration of what the Minister talked about earlier—the UK being a force for good in the world.

The report makes a number of recommendations, but I will pull out just one: to realise the untapped potential of all those areas outside the golden triangle of Oxford, Cambridge and London, all of which now have bodies trying to bring together research from the institutions, the NHS and the universities, to get this underdeveloped and underutilised resource into play.

Finally, the UK is already known as a world finance centre, and I see no reason that it should not become equally well known as a global centre for health and health science. In fact, this is within our grasp and it would be to the benefit of the world and the UK. I ask the Minister, first, whether the Government will support this approach and build up the UK as a global centre for health and health science, alongside their existing commitments to developing and strengthening the NHS and international trade. Secondly, will they ensure that the UK's enormous strengths in health and health science will be at the heart of their preparations and subsequent negotiations for new trade deals?

8.35 pm

Baroness Byford (Con): My Lords, I welcome the measures announced in the gracious Speech and look forward to debating some of the issues as the parliamentary Session proceeds. I shall concentrate on trade, climate change, food production and the environment. First, however, the withdrawal agreement Bill was given a resounding Second Reading in another place. I hope that the debates of scrutiny and revision in this House will work towards a positive new era. We must urgently engage in meaningful discussions. It has been implied that the EU is unwilling to co-operate, which I find surprising as it has a trade surplus with the UK of over £100 billion. It is surely in all our interests that progress is made in establishing new agreements.

Turning to climate change, the Met Office forecasts that our summers will become hotter, and droughts more likely, and that rainfall, when it comes, will be of greater intensity. In Leicestershire, the average rainfall for the past eight years has been between 25 and

[BARONESS BYFORD]

29 inches a year, but in 2019 the total was over 48 inches. We were so much more fortunate than other areas in the country where six inches of rain fell in two days and where families had to leave their homes and farmland was waterlogged. I welcome the Conservative manifesto pledge of £4 billion towards flood defences but I ask the Minister whether the current arrangements for flood management are adequate. I understand that responsibility falls partly between the Environment Agency, the local authorities and the drainage boards. Will this be reviewed? How is the finance allocated?

I turn to land management. How do we value the production of food against any other demands made upon the countryside, be that for renewable energy, growing trees, housing, infrastructure, biodiversity, wildlife, tourism or simply for the health benefits that being outside in the country brings? Some 70% of that land is farmed. We know that population growth will require more food and that more houses will need to be built, but somewhere a balance has to be struck. For my part—I declare our family farming interests as in the register—the first responsibility of any Government is to defend the country and the second is to feed their people. UK farmers produce healthy, affordable food. The Minister referred earlier to our high standards in animal welfare, crop growth and environmental protection. Those high standards of animal welfare, plus the valuable red tractor logo, and many other recognised assurance schemes, give confidence to consumers.

I welcome the commitment in the Conservative manifesto to buy British, especially through public procurement. In looking to future trade deals, we must ensure that the high standards I spoke of earlier are applied equally to imported food, and that UK producers can compete on an even basis—a fair deal for both. I understand that the Government propose to gather and share trade information to support UK businesses against unfair trade practices; this commitment is to be welcomed. Does the Minister have any additional information to share with the House today, or details of what is going to be established?

There are four Bills on my topic awaiting our deliberations: an agriculture Bill, a fisheries Bill, an environment Bill and an animal welfare Bill. I totally agree with the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, on the setting up of the new office for environmental protection: it must be independent, must be financed properly and must have teeth, for without that, it will fail. I hope that these Bills will give us the opportunity to rethink the ways in which we tackle six additional issues: waste, especially food waste; packaging; plastics; fly-tipping; recycling; and renewable energy projects.

We have an enormous amount of work before us. It will require purposeful discussions and the will to pull together to ensure that people throughout Britain can look to a better future. I believe we have a great responsibility; we must not fail them.

8.40 pm

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, Her Majesty's gracious Speech affirmed the UK's commitment to

"work closely with international partners to help solve the most complex international security issues and promote peace and security globally."

That was a very important commitment, yet I deeply regret that I have personally witnessed how, in Nigeria, British foreign policy has caused more harm than good.

In recent years, many thousands of civilians have been killed in attacks led by Islamist Boko Haram and Fulani militias in northern and central-belt states. The underlying drivers of conflict are complex, yet targeted violence and the perpetration of atrocities against predominantly Christian communities suggest that religion and ideology play a key part, as emphasised in the Bishop of Truro's excellent report. Christian communities are specifically targeted. Reliable sources claim that more than 5,000 Christians have been killed since 2015, with 1,000 murdered in 2019. The *Global Terrorism Index* in 2016 and 2017 named Fulani militia as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world, with only Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabaab being accounted deadlier. During many of the attacks, the Fulani are reported by survivors to have shouted "Allahu Akbar", "Destroy the infidels" and "Wipe out the infidels."

The attacks have, on occasion, led to retaliatory violence, as communities can no longer rely on the Government for protection or justice. However, we have seen no evidence of comparability of scale or equivalence of atrocities. During a recent visit to Nigeria, in November, I met survivors of five villages attacked by Fulani militia, forcing an estimated 12,000 people to flee. In two of the villages, 116 people were killed. It was possible to meet only a limited number of survivors, but the consistency of their experiences is deeply disturbing and consistent with evidence from numerous previous visits. These are disturbing statistics, but behind every statistic is a human horror story. I give just a few examples of the suffering of the people: sadly, I could massively multiply them.

Antonia from Karamai said:

"I saw my brother-in-law's body on the ground, hacked to pieces by a machete. Our home was destroyed. The hospital was burnt. They tried to burn the roof of the church by piling up the chairs, like a bonfire."

A pastor from Madugrui said:

"Every day we carry new corpses to the cemetery. They kill farmers. They destroy our homes and churches. They kidnap and rape women."

Ta'aziya from Karamai said:

"We could see bullets whizzing. Everything was destroyed. In our whole village, only two of the homes were not burnt. Almost 50 people were killed."

As a final example, it was my agonising privilege to weep with and to hug Veronica, from Dogon Noma, who told me:

"They attacked me with a machete twice, once to the neck and once to my hand."

I saw the scars. She said:

"They said they wanted my daughter to suck my finger. So they amputated my forefinger and I passed out. When I woke up, I saw my six year-old daughter on the ground, dead, with my chopped finger in her mouth."

More recently, 11 Nigerian Christians were killed by Islamic State terrorists in a brutal Christmas Day attack. The beheadings of the 11 Christians, shown in a video by Islamic State in West Africa, ISWAP, were gruesome so-called revenge for the killing in Syria of

Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In addition to the deep concerns caused by the brutal killings, there are the disturbing implications of the allegiance pledged by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the sect leader of Boko Haram, to ISWAP, suggesting that ISIS has consolidated its hold on a new African frontier. This indicates a more internationally organised terrorist group bringing together Islamist militants to achieve their objectives in west Africa.

While the underlying causes of violence are complex, the asymmetry and escalation of attacks by well-armed Fulani militia upon these predominately Christian communities are stark and must be acknowledged. Such atrocities cannot be attributed just to desertification, climate change or competition for resources, as our Government have claimed. The situation fulfils the criteria of genocide as recognised by the Nigerian National Assembly and must be so recognised, with the international community's duty to respond accordingly.

Given the Nigerian Government's apparent complicity in the persecution of Christians, there is a strong argument that international aid should be curtailed until Abuja fulfils its duties to protect and provide for its own citizens of any belief who are subjected to such horrendous suffering, and to end the impunity with which the perpetrators of atrocities perpetuate their horrendous crimes.

Can the Minister give us an assurance that our Government will fulfil the commitment made in the gracious Speech and pressure the Nigerian Government to protect and provide for all their people, bringing desperately needed protection and help to over 2 million citizens now suffering displacement, the many thousands mourning the deaths of loved ones and all those living in acute danger of terrorist attacks? They have been pleading for help and protection, which have not been forthcoming so far. I passionately hope that the Government's commitment will result in these pleas for help no longer being in vain.

8.45 pm

Baroness Tonge (Non-Aff): My Lords, there are so many subjects that one could talk about after this Queen's Speech, but I will talk about some rumours and speculation which are causing much concern among the people with whom I work.

We have heard from various sources that the Department for International Development is to be absorbed by the Foreign Office. The noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, referred to something in the *Daily Mail* this morning saying that this was not true and was not going to happen. If it were any newspaper but the *Daily Mail*, I might have torn up my speech and decided to talk about something else, but I am not going to as I do not trust that newspaper.

It was suggested most graphically by the Prime Minister nearly a year ago, who alerted me when he said to the *Financial Times*:

"We can't keep spending huge sums of ... money as though we were some ... Scandinavian NGO ... The present system is leading to inevitable waste as money is shoved"—

shoved—"out of the door." He went on to say that aid should "cohere"

"much better with UK political and ... commercial objectives."

I found that very disturbing. I dispute whether his political and commercial objectives would be less wasteful than concentrating on improving the lives of people all over the world, many of whom are seeking asylum because of our mistaken foreign policy or migrating—some here—because we have wrecked the lands on which they depend through our overconsumption of everything. This has been mentioned by many during this debate.

I remind the Government that with our exit from the European Union they want us to become a force for good in the world. The work of the Department for International Development, since it was created in 1997, when I went into the House of Commons, has hugely enhanced our reputation worldwide. If we want the soft power we hear about, it is being exerted already by that department, a point emphasised earlier by the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson.

Wherever I have been in the world in my development work since 1997, I have heard good things about the Department for International Development and the wonderful work it does—far better than any other country and possibly even better than some of those Scandinavian NGOs mentioned by the Prime Minister.

I remind the House that 25% to 30% of DfID's budget is already being diverted to other government departments and cross-government funds with little accountability. These departments include the Foreign Office, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the interestingly named Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. This made me smile a bit, and I wondered whether this fund would be better spent on keeping Donald Trump permanently on his golf course up in Scotland instead of allowing him to further destabilise the Middle East.

I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the Department for International Development will remain and that the commitments made by our Government to family planning and maternal health—my pet subjects—will be honoured, especially those to UNFPA, IPPF and Marie Stopes International. The World Bank has said that providing universal family planning is the single most effective intervention we can make in developing countries for their economic progress; it is the single most effective measure we can take. In particular, I hope that the £600 million pledged by the Secretary of State, Alok Sharma, at the UN Assembly last September and the pledges to prioritise funding for sexual and reproductive health made at the ICPD conference in Nairobi in November will be honoured. Can the Minister please reassure us that the great work done by previous Conservative and Labour Governments through DfID will continue, and that women and girls will remain the top priority in the development agenda?

8.50 pm

The Earl of Dundee (Con): My Lords, I join noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on her excellent speech, which stressed the importance of seeking unity and reconciliation.

I will briefly pick up on a few points from the Queen's Speech concerning foreign affairs. The first concerns the scope to assist grass-roots democracy

[THE EARL OF DUNDEE]

both here and abroad. The Government plan to invest to a greater extent in every part of this country, yet, while in the first place an internal economic objective to help our own communities, internationally this endeavour also stands to benefit other communities elsewhere.

My second point concerns the expectation about any immigration policy: that it should be evaluated not just by efficient management of population movements but against fair and humane standards. Although it is more restricted than it was, if handled properly, the Government's currently revised immigration policy could prove to work well in all these necessary respects.

My third point concerns the distinction between the 28-state affiliation of the EU, which we are leaving, and the far larger one of 47 states, the Council of Europe, which we are not leaving. Thus, correspondingly, through remaining in the Council of Europe, the opportunities for constructive adjustment and leadership in Europe now open to us.

Certainly, the more economic prosperity spreads out from London and the south, the more confident our cities and regions will become—equally, the greater their independence and ability to choose how to sustain and further develop such prosperity. One option is through economic and cultural partnerships, which are increasingly popular. They are formed directly between cities or regions in one country and those in another. Identification of mutual economic advantage comes first. However, political stability is a very welcome by-product.

My noble friend the Minister will recall that the central strategy of the United Kingdom's chairmanship of the Council of Europe a few years ago was to build up local democracy in Europe, for this can provide valuable grass-roots protection against forms of extremism and imbalance if arising within the politics of different nation states. Does my noble friend thus acknowledge the useful part that direct international economic partnerships between different cities and regions already play in assisting local democracy? Can she say what plans the Government, along with local authorities, have to inform, promote and help facilitate them further? Does she agree that their prospects and advantages should be advertised and encouraged in the forthcoming outline structure for trading arrangements post Brexit?

On migration, the Government recently stressed the importance of international action against human trafficking and modern slavery. Last year, this subject was made a priority by the Foreign Ministers of Council of Europe member states. Here I declare an interest as current chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly's Sub-Committee on Refugee and Migrant Children and Young People. A new report focuses on necessary action against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Can my noble friend the Minister confirm that the Government will continue to support such action proposed by the Council of Europe?

Studying abroad is an essential part of modern education. The Council of Europe has drafted conventions for the mutual recognition of studies and degrees in higher education. The UK is already party to these. Nevertheless, can my noble friend tell us how, post

Brexit, the Government will facilitate student mobility once the current versions of Erasmus and other EU programmes come to an end?

Then there is the triple paradox which obtains when foreign students are classified as migrants, for thereby they feel unwelcome and as a result go more readily to study in competitor states. To a lesser extent also will our economy then be able to benefit from their skills, if otherwise they might have studied here and then chosen to stay on. Not least, too, it becomes all the harder for any Government to reduce migration levels in general if foreign students are included within those numbers when they do not need to be at all. Does my noble friend the Minister therefore agree that foreign students should now be removed from official migration statistics?

Finally, through remaining within the large 47-state affiliation of the Council of Europe, there are opportunities for adjustment and leadership in particular that are now open to us. The EU has set up mechanisms for security and law enforcement co-operation. The last British EU Commissioner, Sir Julian King, was responsible for the security union. What plans do the Government now have to ensure that British law enforcement authorities can work properly with their European counterparts, and within the framework of the Council of Europe's legal standards and actions, such as its cybercrime convention and its conventions against terrorism?

By leaving the EU, the foreign service will probably be restructured through deploying resources from departments which until now have been EU focused. The noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, and my noble friend Lord Risby have already referred to this. As a result, will the foreign service increase the resources it allocates to the Council of Europe and other international organisations?

This year, does the Foreign Secretary intend to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and share with parliamentarians from all over Europe the United Kingdom's future vision and approach within Europe?

Brexit simply reflects our recent decision to change trading arrangements with our 27 EU partners; it has nothing to do with the priorities for Europe, which are democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Their consolidation was the goal of Winston Churchill when he launched an initiative in London leading, 70 years ago in 1949, to the formation, along with other like-minded states, of the Council of Europe.

The UK is viewed by our other 46 member state colleagues as a key instigator and custodian of such priorities. In responding to this trust, all the more so now must we protect those values.

8.57 pm

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, we heard in the gracious Speech about

"An Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review ... covering all aspects of international policy from defence to diplomacy and development".

Like other noble Lords, I ask the Minister if she would elaborate on the expected timeline for this review. I also hope that she can reassure the House that a full and proper consultation process will be forthcoming.

However, I would like to focus on the wider objectives of taking an integrated approach to foreign policy and development, because the right thing to do when scrutinising policy is to step back and consider the broader questions. What sort of world do we want to live in, and what should Britain's role be within it? The response is surely this: a safe, prosperous, healthy world, and a well-respected Britain with a reliable network of security allies and trading partners. It is those objectives that should guide our international policy and that I will use throughout my speech.

Girls' education and climate were the only development areas mentioned in the gracious Speech, so they are a clear priority for the Government. GAVI replenishment is an obvious priority for the Secretary of State, made clear by his ending preventable deaths strategy, as we have already heard. I congratulate the Government on their work in these areas. Education, climate and vaccines are key building blocks for creating a world in which we all want to live.

However, I am concerned that the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth summit is not being prioritised to the same extent. The summit is of such importance that the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, who is in his place, and I co-chair an APPG on it. Nutrition is the foundation of the health of every one of us. According to the WHO, malnutrition is the number one cause of illness worldwide and contributes to the deaths of almost half of all under-fives. Malnutrition causes irreversible physical and cognitive stunting. Thirty-three per cent of children across Africa are stunted due to malnutrition and are therefore unlikely to meet their full potential as adults.

Successive Conservative Governments have championed nutrition both domestically and abroad. The UK's first ever national food strategy is being developed as we speak. It was David Cameron's Government who hosted the first ever Nutrition for Growth summit back in 2013. The summit raised over £17 billion and stakeholders signed up to ambitious targets to end malnutrition. Sadly, we are behind on almost all targets, and at the end of this year there is no new UK funding for nutrition. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, that the Tokyo summit is an opportunity to put that right. The Government must grasp it if they want to meet their other global objectives.

Let us take girls' education, for example. It is no coincidence that girls are disproportionately affected by malnutrition and face more barriers to education than boys. Girls often eat least and last, despite their additional nutrition needs, particularly during menstruation. The health problems caused by malnutrition mean that, despite our best efforts, unless we tackle malnutrition, many girls will never attend school and those who do are unlikely to meet their potential.

The same is true for GAVI, as the efficacy of vaccines is massively reduced if the recipient is malnourished. Without stepping up efforts to end malnutrition, the Secretary of State cannot meet his commitment to end preventable deaths by 2030, as mentioned by the Minister.

Agriculture and food systems are extremely sensitive to climate change, as many noble Lords have indicated. At the same time, they contribute 20% to 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We must take a

holistic approach, developing food and agriculture systems that are both climate-friendly and supportive of healthy, diverse diets.

When done right, all these things contribute to the UK's wider foreign policy objectives. Just listen, for example, to the head of the UN World Food Programme recount conversations he had in Syria:

"My husband did not want to join Isis but we had no food, we had no choice."

Likewise, on trade and diplomacy, less poverty equals more trade and greater security. Being an active member of the donor community improves Britain's standing with other aid donors, such as America, the EU and Japan.

We need a foreign policy that is not about box ticking. If Britain is to spend large sums of money on girls' education, vaccinations or climate change, let us not just tick the box, let us accelerate the impact of those interventions and look at them in the wider context of our vision for this world and Britain's place in it.

I kindly request that the noble Lord—

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): I remind the noble Baroness of the advisory speaking time.

Baroness Manzoor: I am just coming to the end. Would a DFID Minister be happy to meet the APPG to look at the summit in Tokyo?

9.03 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB): My Lords, the die is cast in political terms. We are leaving the EU, but there is still a way to go before we cast off completely from Europe. I remain a remainer. I not only think the decision to leave was wrong, but I believe and hope we shall make every effort to coincide the interests of the UK with those of our European allies. That much I think the Minister could and will accept today. After all, our security—as well as our economy—depends on it.

It is early days, but fortunately this Government have not yet set their priorities in stone. There is much to be negotiated, not just on trade but on our relationship with the various elements of the Commission that have been an essential part of our foreign policy for over four decades. The sharing of data and intelligence in respect of both criminal activity and our defence and security is critical to our future identity. As a leader in international development, we are also bound to work with our European neighbours.

On defence, the US remains our key ally in NATO, despite its impetuous, disaster-prone and sometimes reckless President, as we have heard more than once today. France and Germany will become the key European axis, with the UK now at one remove. But we must stay close to President Macron, who seems to have a Gaullist streak—although the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, said that he is a listening President. He certainly needs more external distractions at the moment and his position at home is precarious; nevertheless, he has done the rest of us a great favour in challenging Presidents Trump and Erdoğan simultaneously for their outrageous disregard for NATO and international co-operation in

[THE EARL OF SANDWICH]

Syria. The Turkish invasion broke all the rules and our oldest ally failed to consult even EU and NATO members. Then came last week's strikes against Iran, including the disproportionate killing of General Soleimani, and not even the signatories of the Iran nuclear treaty complained. NATO allies now have to patch it up with Turkey: they have to pay their 2% subs in full—Trump is right about that. As Jeremy Hunt recently pointed out, as long as the US pays double it will always call the shots.

The war between Russia and Ukraine following Moscow's annexation of Crimea has cost thousands of lives. The election of President Zelensky has led to prisoner swaps and some hopes of peace in Donbass, but Russia's continual bullying over the new gas pipeline and President Trump's attempted investigation of the Biden family have muddied the waters still further. US sanctions and Putin's attitude to the INF treaty have left the EU looking incapable. There is certainly no room for the UK in this multiple crisis, and yet, as a NATO partner, we have to remain on full alert and expect that the worst may happen.

The western Balkans remain another priority for NATO, and this time our own defence forces have an important ground role, only 20 years after the war in Bosnia and Kosovo. Once again, Russia's dirty tricks must keep us on our guard.

While NATO's role in the Middle East remains uncertain, its relations with Africa are more defined as a result of the agreement signed with the African Union in Naples on 4 November. This will lead to greater co-operation in exercises and training.

I am impressed by the British Army's involvement in international development, especially in Unity state in South Sudan, which I have visited and where I have followed events quite closely. About 300 soldiers, some trained engineers, have been clearing roads and making aid more accessible, including helping women and children to reach the UN distribution centres. On one road near Bentiu, in the course of a fortnight, a number of women were raped on their way to collect food. It is one of the most dangerous areas in the world because of prevailing conflict over oil resources and the failure of government to reconcile different ethnic groups. Human security is becoming a normal target of aid missions such as this one, and the MoD and other ministries are to be congratulated on this joined-up approach. Nevertheless, many of us have concerns about the proposed merger of our aid programme. Conflict prevention is easily understood as a joint ministry programme, but integrating all our aid and diplomatic missions would be clumsy, impracticable and unaccountable.

Incidentally, I was pleased to hear the Minister mention special protection for developing countries against climate change. I look forward to hearing more details on that.

9.08 pm

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, on her maiden speech. At the same time, I refer the House to my non-financial registered interest as president of the Conservative Friends of Israel.

We live in a dangerous world, so it is right that the Government can now form their own foreign policy and stand firm against those who threaten our values—Qasem Soleimani unambiguously threatened our values.

I also welcome the Government's commitment in the gracious Speech to ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries. The Prime Minister talked of the "nauseating frequency" with which Israel is singled out. Your Lordships will permit me to continue this theme.

While we were engaged in a general election, the General Assembly of the United Nations was in session passing resolutions on hot spots around the globe, calling out countries that needed calling out. There was one resolution on North Korea, one on Syria, one on Iran, and two on Russia. There were no resolutions on China, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. But there were no fewer than 18 resolutions on Israel. That is totally unacceptable and, what is more, far too often the UK votes for these resolutions.

On Friday 13 December, as the final results of our election were being announced, a resolution was passed at the UN General Assembly on

"Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

I would need more than the five minutes allocated to explain that the premise of the resolution is unacceptable. However, suffice it for me to say that the resolution totally ignored terror attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel, referring to them as "tensions and violence". It negated the deadly attacks in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, and it sought to strip Israel of its inherent right to self-defence by classifying every defensive measure as a violation of international law. In addition, it referred to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem only by its Islamic name, Haram al-Sharif. What did we do? We voted for the resolution, whereas our allies and friends in Canada, Australia and the US had the courage to vote against it.

I have no problem with legitimate criticism where it is due, but this obsession with Israel needs to be addressed. Israel is being singled out with nauseating frequency, to borrow a phrase, and we are joining in. This singling out of the Jewish state is wrong, unjustified and plays a role in the rise and rise of anti-Semitism. Whether it manifests itself in Monsey in the United States or just down the road in South Hampstead, it arises, as we have seen in the Labour Party, when there is a failure of leadership on the grandest scale.

As we began today's debate it was a Jewish fast day: the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tevet. It marks the day when the siege of Jerusalem was begun by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon in 586 BC/BCE—the beginning of the battle that ultimately destroyed the first Temple. Yet there are resolutions at UN agencies that recognise no Jewish connection to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. I therefore urge the Minister to look very carefully before we sign up to resolutions at the UN and other bodies.

In conclusion, I am unapologetic for raising once again the issue of Palestinian prisoner salary payments. In contradiction of its assurances to the international

community, the Palestinian Authority pays monthly salaries to Palestinian terrorists and their families. In 2018, the Palestinian Authority paid over £260 million—around 7% of its annual budget—on salaries to killers and murderers. In November 2019, the Netherlands became the first European country to discontinue direct aid to the Palestinian Authority due to its terror reward policy. I therefore urge the Minister also to look carefully at this. We must pay our way, but not when our aid is used to pay for slay. We must find a method by which aid payments serve the recipients who need our support in Palestinian society and at the same time serve the interests of the British taxpayer.

9.13 pm

Lord Ricketts (CB): My Lords, as the noble Lord, Lord Polak, just reminded us, General Soleimani was a deeply dangerous man. However, the truth is that all America's allies were caught short by his killing, and all now face an unpredictable situation in the Middle East, perhaps as dangerous as any since 2003. I know that officials have been working flat out since Friday to make sure that measures are taken to keep British people and interests as safe as they can. I listened carefully to the Statement made earlier this afternoon and welcome the immediate steps the Government are taking. However, whatever the intentions behind the attack, it has already damaged western interests. It has increased the prospect of terrorist attacks, including unplanned, opportunistic attacks. It has undercut the moderates in Iran and strengthened the hardliners. It has exposed the coalition military forces in Iraq—including British forces—to greater risk. They were doing vital work in the fight against ISIS, but there must now be a real risk that any western military presence in Iraq will become unsustainable. I fear that it has also removed any last prospect of keeping the nuclear deal alive.

This upheaval comes on top of President Trump's decision before Christmas to pull US forces out of northern Syria—which left Turkey and Russia as the dominant players in the area—and his plan to pull remaining US forces out of Afghanistan. The upshot of all this could be an American military and political retreat from that whole arc of crisis from Turkey to Pakistan. That would leave Britain, the US and other western allies with powerful military forces and major interests in the Gulf facing a vast area to the north dominated by Russia, Turkey and Iran. That does not feel like a recipe for stability. If this is too apocalyptic, perhaps the Minister could tell me where my analysis is wrong. This feels to me like a major strategic shift.

The statement by the three European leaders on Sunday was remarkable for not making any mention of the US or the attack on General Soleimani. It shows how divided the West is as we deal with this crisis. Once again, Britain finds more common ground with our European friends than with Washington. The Foreign Secretary's visit to Washington is timely and important, and it will be a real test of whether Britain can go on playing the traditional go-between role that we have played in the past. I very much hope that we can, but my goodness, it is a delicate operation.

The Middle East is not the only area of strategic incoherence in our world. President Macron's description of NATO as brain dead was a bit on the strong side.

The Government deserve credit for piloting to success the NATO summit at Watford, which showed that the military side of the alliance is in good shape. But is the Macron thesis wholly wrong? I do not think that it is. Look at Donald Trump's impatience with multilateralism, his pursuit of great power competition and bilateral arm-twisting. Look at European leaders who are pursuing strategic autonomy for Europe as their confidence in the American defence guarantee wanes. As other noble Lords have said, Turkey is pursuing its own line, which does not square with our interests or values. Britain is left uncomfortably trying to bridge the gaps and find fixes within the alliance. Can the Minister tell us how the process of reflection about NATO's future, which was announced in the Watford communiqué, will be taken forward?

The gracious Speech, as other noble Lords have noted, declares the Government's intention to hold an integrated security, defence and foreign policy review. I was co-ordinator of the 2010 strategic defence and security review which got such low marks earlier from the noble Lord, Lord Houghton. I wish my former colleagues well with what will be the third review in a decade, but with the world changing so fast, we need to look again at the basic assumptions of British strategy. We need a new national strategy and a convincing narrative to back it up—based, as the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, said earlier, on a broad national conversation, to give us a base of public support. I hope that it would conclude that Britain is still an active global player, while recognising our limits and avoiding tub-thumping.

Here is my challenge for the strategists. Would it not be powerful if they could come up with a distinctly attractive British proposition to reinforce multilateralism? What better country to do that? We should aim for a group of like-minded, mid-sized democracies, not just the Europeans but Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Korea, all of which share the same world view as us. We could work through international institutions as they exist and think about new groupings. That will need action and political will. I believe that the Americans are capable of again recognising the importance of multilateralism to solve their problems.

I finish with a piece of breaking news. I was going to ask the Minister if we can look forward to there being a British ambassador in Washington in this troubled world. However, I find that the No. 10 spokesman today announced that the job of ambassador has been advertised. Before noble Lords send their nomination papers to the Minister, I should just draw attention to the last sentence of the announcement, which says that the Government expect to fill the role from within the Civil Service. I am sorry.

9.20 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Hooper, with regard to thinking on Latin America. For my part, I have just returned from opening a hub in Mexico City to cover the Americas and the Caribbean. But it is to matters Russia and Uzbekistan that I wish to turn, before saying a word on events in the Middle East, with the common theme of the need for dialogue and engagement.

[VISCOUNT WAVERLEY]

Following a chance but in-depth meeting in Nur-Sultan with the speaker of Russia's Duma, Mr Volodin, I received an invitation to visit Moscow with two colleagues. The criterion that underpinned this invitation was that it should be parliamentarian to parliamentarian. All arms of government on both sides were aware, however, with funding arrangements made available by this House.

Time does not allow me today to go into the detail, other than to confirm that two full days' straight-talk meetings, leaving no subject untouched, went well. Care was taken not to be perceived to undermine the interaction of government-to-government dialogue and to ensure that meetings were held across the political spectrum. I should refer to the constructive meeting with Speaker Volodin, as indeed with the International Committee of the Federation Council. A net outcome is that Duma and Federation Council members have requested to visit the UK to continue the dialogue as being a progression of things. I commend this initiative to the Government, although I recognise that this is not formally required. Parliament-to-parliament interaction is too often a missing component of bilateral relations.

Following the call to Moscow, I was invited to Tashkent. My visit coincided with Uzbekistan's parliamentary elections, not so much to view the electoral process itself but to offer support to a country that is clearly in a positive transition mode. Uzbekistan is increasingly seen as the rising star among emerging and frontier markets—a view validated by the *Economist* ranking it as the most improved nation in 2019. Uzbekistan, as the most populous and strategically located nation in central Asia, is well positioned to play a leading role. It has come a long way in liberalising economic and monetary policies and opening up to foreign and domestic private investment in the past three years. Decades of a controlled economy following independence are now being fulfilled through a more open and growing economy, with Uzbekistan fast emerging as a regional political power, underpinned by conducive policy and legal structures.

Fundamentals remain solid and investor interest will not fade so long as that Government's commitment to reforms continues. I share the sentiment that the time has come for a Prime Minister's trade envoy to be appointed. As for the electoral process itself, it can best be summarised by one professor of sciences, who explained that he was motivated to vote for the first time as a direct result of the improved environment.

Watching how the Middle East—a region with which I can identify for multiple reasons—plays out the aggression and sabre-rattling with all component actors will determine whether we are headed for direct warfare or a period of prolonged aggression, directly or indirectly through proxies. It is with proxies where the situation could easily get out of hand. Extreme caution needs to be taken. We must not behave in any cavalier fashion, particularly if associated with political gain, which could have the additional detriment of potentially reinforcing the East-West divide, playing into the hands of a China/Iran/Russia/Turkey axis. The region is complex and dangerous enough, where long-term de-escalation can be established only with

matter-of-fact trust-building dialogue. Experience, a skill set and sensitivity to the present, historical, religious and cultural contexts—with engagement, not isolation—is key. Equally, the West must ensure that no double standards or lack of respect are displayed to ancient civilisations and temperament.

9.24 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in welcoming the maiden speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie. I also wish briefly to stress the importance of autonomy for the Department for International Development. Before Christmas, 28,000 people signed a petition led by ActionAid UK stressing that point. It is a reminder of the importance of civil society in balancing our weak and outdated political structures.

In this speech, I shall focus on the climate emergency. Perhaps many of your Lordships were listening to the "Today" programme on 30 December—if you were not on holiday in a luxury Caribbean resort—when you would have heard 16 year-old Greta Thunberg interviewing 93 year-old Sir David Attenborough. I do not wish to make undue reference to the average age in your Lordships' House, but I urge you to draw lessons from Sir David's response. He thanked Greta and the huge number of climate strikers, young people, most of whom still do not have a vote, who have made a massive impact in raising the climate emergency up the global agenda.

Too often when we are talking about young people and the climate emergency, the terms are paternalistic. I am afraid Angela Merkel sounded very much like that in her new year message when she said, "We have to look after the future of our children and grandchildren." That does not acknowledge the agency, power and impact that the young climate strikers have already had. It ignores the fact that the climate emergency is not something in the future but is here and now.

Public Health England today brought out figures showing that last year the heatwaves in the UK killed 900 people who would not otherwise have died. A very, very long time ago the Lord Speaker started today's sitting by referring to the tragedy and disaster of the Australian bushfires. In 2009—a decade ago—I wrote a piece for the *Guardian* saying that the Australian way of life would have to change radically because of the climate emergency. That is now more evident than ever, but nothing has yet changed in Australia's policies, actions and way of life.

A number of noble Lords have referred to the fact that we shall be debating our third effort at an environment Bill. That reflects a year of stasis, a year of failure when nothing happened when it was very clear that we were in a state of emergency. Of course, we have actually had a decade of failure, a lost decade of climate inaction since the failure of the Copenhagen UN talks. The need to act is clear, and our politics have failed. If you think about the young climate strikers in your communities and in your families, that decade is the entire world they have known. They have known nothing else but climate emergency, but it is to their great credit that they have not despaired but have acted.

So I echo the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, in saying to your Lordships that you also have to act. The young climate strikers of Britain need representation in Parliament. They have not got it in the other place. The 56% of Britons who are not represented in this Government do not have representation or a powerful voice in another place. Your Lordships have to be that voice.

As the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, so powerfully demonstrated, we saw the impact of the one in 100 voters—44% of people—who put in place a Prime Minister who has a track record of much more than flirting with climate change deniers and a Government funded by big money from the City and the people who are benefiting from trashing our environment and our world. We have the politics they pay for.

So please, your Lordships, follow Sir David who, at the age of 93, continues to act, to make television programmes and to come to this House this month to speak to us about the climate emergency. Please step up for the climate strikers who need your representation, who need you to offer hope. It is in our hands; there are no other hands available.

9.29 pm

Viscount Eccles (Con): My Lords, I will reflect briefly on the great office of state of Foreign Secretary and will try to see whether there is an opportunity in what is happening now for that office to regain the limelight that I believe it deserves.

One thing that is certain is that change takes place all the time, and the biggest change will be our departure from the European Union. If you put that together with the weakening of the special relationship, I think that we have the opportunity to develop a voice of our own. In fact, I am not sure that we have any choice but to develop a voice of our own, and I hope that we are not too unsure of our ability to do that. The noble Lord, Lord Crisp, pointed to one way in which we could develop a stronger position in the world. After all, we are one of the largest economies, even if the great shift of power to both sides of the Pacific has changed the status of Europe dramatically.

That takes me to the 16th paragraph of the gracious Speech, which has been referred to many times. I am not sure why it was right to make it the last paragraph. It is very uneven. It starts:

“My Government will work to promote and expand the United Kingdom’s influence in the world.”

Motherhood and apple pie come to mind. I am sure that Lord Salisbury, who was four times Foreign Secretary, would have said, “I don’t quite know why you would want to put that in.” The last sentence of the paragraph is a bit curious. It refers to

“working to ensure that all girls have access to twelve years of quality education.”

Quite clearly, that is a very good idea, and indeed why stop at 12? I thought that university was also open to the girls of the world, or it certainly should be. However, I wonder why that is tagged on to that paragraph. There are lots of other options for a single objective to be included. I was left thinking, “I wonder what Ernie Bevin would have thought about that sentence?”

That takes me back to the middle of the paragraph and the reference to the integrated review. I have two comments to make. First, I would prefer to have a Prime Minister and a Cabinet who told us what they thought our position in the world was. I am rather worried that they feel that they need somebody else to tell them. I seem to remember that Harold Macmillan was pretty good at telling us where we were, and I would have thought that that was something that should land on the Prime Minister’s desk.

My other comment is on the reference to development, which is tagged on to the end of that sentence. I understand why noble Lords have a certain hesitation about what it means. I used to work in development—for the Commonwealth Development Corporation—so I am committed to economic development, but there is a huge place for a conventional aid programme as well. The question is not whether we should have them both but how to balance the expenditure of the 0.7% between the two. When I was involved, I was the responsibility of a Minister of State at the Foreign Office—Chris Patten, for example—and I do not remember that being any great barrier to the way in which what was then called ODA worked. Therefore, I do not quite share the apprehensions of some of your Lordships about the realignment between DfID and the Foreign Office. Whatever that realignment may be, I hope that it will give more leverage and power to the Foreign Office, because that is our lead department. I look forward to a real recrudescence of influence in the world—of imagination and policymaking—coming from our Foreign Office.

9.35 pm

Lord Owen (Ind SD): My Lords, as we talk in this Chamber, the Middle East is once again a powder keg of extreme danger. I share all the apprehensions and fears that were expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, in his very important speech. It is easy to say what to do. The Secretary-General gave a very good, precise order of priorities as soon as this crisis blew up. He said:

“Stop escalation. Exercise maximum restraint. Restart dialogue” and avoid a new war.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—the JCPOA—the organisation that desperately tries to keep open a dialogue with Iran on nuclear weapons, has once again shown remarkable tenacity and determination to try to rescue something in that area, but we should not put too much on this issue. We have to ask ourselves now what mechanisms we have for restarting the dialogue; it has not restarted and shows no real sign of restarting. The UN Security Council will debate this issue.

The UN Secretary-General appointed an individual, a British person, to be his representative over Yemen, and he has done as much as any human being can do. What he lacks is the clout of the big players in the Middle East. Let us face it, those big players are now very clear. From the moment Putin responded to the plea from the President of Syria to rescue Damascus, which I believe was a very important and correct decision to take, Russia has restored its position. It was at one time very powerful in the Middle East, and it is a powerful player now. It is noticeable how frequently President Putin talks not just to Iran and Arab leaders but to Netanyahu; there is a constant dialogue.

[LORD OWEN]

The place where there is no dialogue, and I regret it deeply, is between President Trump and President Putin. We all know the reasons why it is difficult for that to happen during this presidency, but it has never been more urgent, and countries with many different positions on relations with Russia and relations with the United States should all try to encourage a dialogue between Putin and Trump—in particular, a dialogue between trusted representatives of the two of them. That is not easy to find, to be blunt, but we have had experience in the past of trying to develop new mechanisms. The contact group in southern Africa in 1978 proved to be remarkably successful over a long period of time on a resolution that was negotiated then. Namibia came to independence 12 years later. The contact group in the Balkans in 1994 also had some success, and it may be time for another contact group.

It is interesting now how China has a real stake in what happens to the tankers coming in and out of the Gulf. As they go through the Strait of Hormuz, more and more of them now turn left, figuratively speaking. The United States does not itself have much interest in oil coming out of the Gulf. The Iranians, the Russians and the Chinese formed a maritime group almost as a demonstration to those of us who also tried to form maritime groups to protect shipping. But I believe that the biggest danger, as was mentioned earlier, is a proxy starting this war. It could happen at any stage. It has become very clear that many Iranian troops go from Iraq into Syria and then into Lebanon. That pathway has been clearly marked for at least three years, and we have done practically nothing about it. We have to focus on that.

I believe that the Secretary-General and the UN Security Council have a very real responsibility, and it may be that the only thing they can do is to use the five permanent members and appoint people with weight and experience to tour around the Middle East and start a dialogue.

9.40 pm

Lord Sterling of Plaistow (Con): My Lords, I appreciate being able to participate in this debate following Her Majesty's gracious Speech on 19 December. I intend to speak on defence. I totally support the analysis by the noble Lord, Lord West, of the last 10 years.

I have decided that what I said after the gracious Speech of 14 October 2019 has not changed in substance but needs serious emphasis, taking into account the very recent events in the Middle East following the assassination of General Soleimani. Our immediate responsibility is to protect British citizens and maritime shipping in key areas such as the Gulf of Hormuz and the Emirate states, but one has to accept that in this modern world revenge attacks could take place anywhere. The Royal Navy and the marine commandos will, of course, need to play an enhanced role in this endeavour.

I suggest it is worth remembering that in the gracious Speech in 2015 the Queen emphasised the following:

"My government will continue to play a leading role in global affairs, using its presence all over the world to re-engage with and tackle the major international security, economic and humanitarian challenges."

Her gracious Speech of 14 October 2019 once again emphasised:

"My Government will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces. My Ministers will honour *The Armed Forces Covenant* and the NATO commitment to spend at least 2% of national income on defence."

Most recently, on 19 December, she once again emphasised:

"My Ministers will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces. My Government will honour the Armed Forces Covenant, which will be ... incorporated into law, and the NATO commitment to spend at least two per cent".

She continued:

"My Government will work to promote and expand the United Kingdom's influence in the world. An Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review will be undertaken to reassess the nation's place in the world",

which has been commented on by many noble Lords today.

Transformation and innovation are now entering the bloodstream of our Armed Forces, led by the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nicholas Carter, and the chiefs. This attitude of mind is transforming the future capability of our Armed Forces. The right leadership and a sense of urgency are crucial for these goals to be met, and of course this is a continuous process. However, it must be remembered and realised that, since the devastating cuts made in 2010, our Armed Forces are still very seriously hollowed out, despite doing their best to meet the demands of Her Majesty's Government, increasingly east of Suez. China's ambitions are, of course, such that we will consider them a long-term concern.

Truly serious extra financial resource will be essential to strongly enhancing our conventional forces' capability. Further monies are required to finance areas such as intelligence, cyberspace and other new technology that will increasingly be involved in future warfare. It goes without saying that a strong economy is of crucial importance, but it is a matter of choice. Recent events have demonstrated that we need much greater flexible capability that will ensure a rapid response when required. Crucial to all this, of course, is to have the finest young men and women, highly trained and kitted out with the best equipment and totally prepared to serve our country, who may sadly have to accept the ultimate sacrifice.

The only thing fixed post Brexit will be our geography. We will still be an island nation, hugely involved in and dependent on maritime trade, as we have been for hundreds of years. Global Britain will need all its defence capabilities, particularly the Royal Navy, which is the only persistently globally deployed force. As I have said before, defence is like insurance: the policy that pays out is dependent on the premium that you pay. Currently, we are paying for value insurance and expecting a "gold" solution. Value comes from spending money more wisely, particularly through proper procurement policies. We need value for money, not cost, as dictated by the Treasury.

As I have said before, key to all the above is the following question, particularly now that we have a strong Government in power: what is our long-term foreign policy? Are we going to choose our destiny or have it thrust on us? At the end of 2019, I made a

request to the Chief Whip, my noble friend Lord Ashton of Hyde, that a major debate on defence and foreign policy should be held and he has kindly indicated that such a debate will take place. Taking account of recent events, such a debate will be most timely and highly welcomed by all in this House, and indeed in the other place.

I finish by saying that the Prime Minister has great ambitions for the future of this great country, which I totally share. I ask the Minister, my noble friend Lady Goldie, to take into account that such ambitions require the level of support provided by our armed services if we are to meet the requirements for the security of this country.

9.46 pm

Lord Naseby (Con): My Lords, for 23 years, I was a Member of Parliament for the marginal seat of Northampton South. What a joy it is to see the majority in that marginal seat move from 1,000 to 4,400—it quadrupled. The reason for that was not just what was done on the ground but a reflection of the British people's faith in the determination and leadership of our Prime Minister. I pay particular tribute to him for what he has done for our country.

It is also 23 years that I have been in your Lordships' House, on the Back Benches. In that time, I have taken an interest in south Asia and a specific interest in a country that I first worked in when I had nothing to do with politics, which was then called Ceylon. It is a great friend of this country. Thousands of its people were killed over the two world wars. It was one of the few countries to speak up in our favour over the Falklands. It faced a huge problem of a quasi 30-year war against the Tamil Tigers, which became a real war on 1 January 2009, covered by the international humanitarian law conditions, and lasted until 18 May. I have in my possession the heavily redacted reports from Colonel Gash describing what happened on the ground.

A year after that, the UN decided to set up a three-man mission to investigate. It did not take evidence on the ground in Sri Lanka but asked for submissions to be made. Those submissions have never been made public and are covered by a 30-year rule, so nobody knows what they really were. However, the UN slowly took a greater interest in what was happening in Sri Lanka and the net result was that, in March 2012, it set up a body under the UNHCR that is chaired today by the United Kingdom. Its role is to promote reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka—I make no argument about that. However, this has to happen in the context of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

It started in March 2012 and here we are, eight years further on. Has Sri Lanka co-operated? Yes. Some 90% of the land that was used by the military during the war has been given back to the private sector. De-mining has nearly ended, with a big thank you to all involved. Around 300,000 people have been rehoused since the war. Infrastructure has been restored, and so on.

I have one further point. There are complaints about torture. I have seen the ICRC three times and asked it whether it has seen torture in Sri Lanka.

Every time, the answer has been clear: no. It is fake news. Today, there is a shadow. That is the claim that the UN started with—of 40,000 killed.

I have spent 10 years looking at the reports by Gash and the Tamil university teachers, at the census and at all the coverage I could find. The net result is about 6,000 people killed, of which a quarter are Tamil Tigers. Despite all this, we now find that the UNHCR has decided that it wants to try to get war crimes pinned on the Sri Lankan army. Yet the reports of Colonel Gash made it clear that that army behaved admirably and looked after the civilians. If it had wanted to knock them off, then over 295,000 would not have been safely brought across the lines, would they? I believe that the time has come for the March review, when it takes place, to be the wind-up time for that phase of life in Sri Lanka.

We now have two new leaders: one here in the UK full of drive, determination and commitment; there is an almost identical philosophy in the newly elected Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a man of proven leadership and ability, with an agenda to keep the peace and have an inclusive policy for minorities, et cetera. I see huge opportunities for trade. My noble friend Lord Sheikh raised some of them and I concur. There is a huge opportunity, but only if the UNHCR project is wound up. I say to this House and to my noble friend on the Front Bench that this is the year for the UK to have faith in Sri Lanka and its newly elected executive President.

9.51 pm

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I have the task of responding from these Benches after more than 60 speakers who have covered a huge range of areas across foreign affairs, defence, international development, trade, climate change and the environment. Who would have thought it would even have been relevant to touch on the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the "Mayflower"? But in the title of this debate there is a missing elephant. As my noble friend Lady Ludford noted in her brave and passionate speech, from within the Government there is, we hear, the stricture that no one should mention Brexit. I note that, perhaps in keeping with this, the debate was not opened—and will not be closed—by the Brexit Minister, even though our relationship with Europe will dominate this year and for many years to come, as well as every subject we have debated today and throughout this week. That takes nothing from the abilities of either the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner, or the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, but it is striking.

The Government gained an extra 300,000 votes in the 2019 general election but thereby an 80-seat majority. Therefore, to my huge regret, like that of others, we will leave the EU on 31 January. However, that settles nothing beyond that point. Here we must all fully engage to make sure that the UK ends up in the best possible position, despite the reservations of many of us about what we are setting aside. Here I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, for her wonderful and unifying speech.

Foreign affairs were covered by many. I hear what the noble Marquess, Lord Lothian, said about the UK needing a new foreign policy. Interestingly, he thought

[BARONESS NORTHOVER]

that this could in fact distance us—rather than the opposite—in relation to the United States when we look at its actions in the Middle East. The noble Lords, Lord Ricketts and Lord Owen, and others noted the greater risks we now face as a result of Trump's actions and the need to ally with others. The noble Lord, Lord Jay, stated with great clarity that we must not associate ourselves with the US if it is wrong, or distance ourselves from the EU if it is right. Yet this week we can see the agonies of the UK's dilemma as we respond to Trump in relation to Iran. The Government know that they are potentially beholden to an unpredictable US President if they are to get the trade deal they seek.

The noble Baroness, Lady Helic, said that if the US did not involve us in its decision, it indicated that we may be in a worse position even than she had feared. Many noble Lords with great wisdom and experience warned of the global risks having been increased by Trump's actions.

In the past, we have sought to act as a bridge between the EU and the US, but our membership of the EU has acted as a useful counterweight in our relationship with the US. Although I was glad to hear in the gracious Speech that the Government will,

“promote the United Kingdom's interests, including freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law”,

like other noble Lords, I wonder what will happen in reality. What will we be willing to say to China in relation to Hong Kong or the Uighurs, as flagged by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, or in respect of human rights in Gulf countries, as emphasised by my noble friend Lord Scriven? What action do we take if, as my noble friend Lord Chidgey pointed out, the US pulls out from parts of Africa where terrorism is being fostered? How will we deal with our long-standing commitments in the EU, such as that to Cyprus, as outlined by my noble friend Lord Sharkey or, for that matter, with Commonwealth countries which have depended on us to make their case in the EU?

In defence, we have long worked closely with our European allies such as the French so that we could maximise our effect. How will we maximise that now? We heard from noble Lords with huge expertise how overstretched we already are. Will the Government at last be open with the public and the press about working in complementary fashion with our European allies, or will we hear those familiar stories of European armies?

In international development, we heard that DfID, renowned throughout the world, might be merged with the FCO. Many noble Lords have expressed concern about that, and I was encouraged to see that the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, was here and nodding in agreement. Today, the *Daily Mail* reveals that the Government may not do that. Like my noble friends Lord Bruce and Lady Sheehan and many others, and, most strikingly, the former Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, the noble Lord, Lord Jay, I ask the Minister to confirm that DfID will not be rolled into the FCO.

I am glad that the largely cross-party agreement on DfID has been reflected here. It is what carried through the Private Member's Bill of my noble friend

Lord Purvis of Tweed in the last days of the coalition, committing the UK to the UN target of 0.7% on development. That commitment clearly still holds. DfID's renown is deserved and I, for one, know just how much effort has been put into family planning, as rightly demanded by the noble Lord, Lord King, and others.

Many noble Lords have addressed climate change, which is very welcome. Noble Lords including the noble Baronesses, Lady Hayman and Lady Young, and the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, while welcoming the Government's stated commitment, thought that we needed to be more ambitious. I do not think that the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, could bring herself to welcome that commitment—she saw it as so weak. It is clearly vital that, at the very least, the body proposed by the Government can actually hold them to account. Will it have teeth? We were the major influence in making sure that the EU signed up ambitiously to the Paris Agreement. My right honourable friend Ed Davey as Secretary of State played a key role, acting with and through the EU. We were thus able to maximise what the UK alone could achieve. Now, as we come up to hosting COP 26 in Glasgow, jointly with Italy as we could no longer be sure of securing it by ourselves, can we be as effective? The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, warned of our reduced diplomatic power, yet we now need to achieve so much more in Glasgow, as is made crystal clear by fires in Australia and floods in Indonesia.

Where are we on trade? There is no trade deal with the EU that is better than being in the EU single market and customs union and being a voice at the table. I recall that, at first, we heard we would get all sorts of benefits from leaving. Then we heard that we would roll over current arrangements—so, no benefit from leaving the EU. Then we heard that countries were not prepared just to roll over agreements—it clearly was not just up to us—and they wanted to see what our relationship with the EU was first. Membership of the EU has never stopped Germany building a bigger trade with China than we have. In this area, much will need to be decided this year.

In conclusion, the Conservatives have the majority they sought, and the Brexit that so many of them sought. They must know that they bear a heavy responsibility now. It is clear that we cannot stand back. Our task must be to hold the Government to account, for the interests of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as an entity, for the poorest as well as the better off in our society, for the young, as well as those who are older. We must do this also for Britain's place in a world threatened by climate change and conflict, as this debate has so amply demonstrated. I look forward to the noble Baroness's comprehensive reply.

10.01 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, for his comprehensive introduction of the topics under debate today on the gracious Speech. He covered the ground very well, which we appreciate. Like many noble Lords, I was struck by the excellent maiden

speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, including the information about where St Patrick is buried—something which we did not all know—and particularly by her analysis of the contribution of your Lordships' House to making good some of the issues raised in her own Province and to the effective governance of the country as a whole. We look forward to her future contributions.

I thank all noble Lords who have contributed to today's full debate. It is, I suppose, a sort of amuse-bouche—a point picked up by a number of noble Lords. It gives your Lordships' House a sense of the Government's thinking on their major policies, selected, as they are, from the manifesto. Like my noble friend Lord Judd, I was heartened by the tone set by the Minister in his opening speech but, rather like the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, I wonder whether some of the issues outlined there are actually going to appear. As my noble friend Lady Young of Old Scone said, the proof of the pudding will come when we see the actual text of the Bills which will carry forward those plans and get a sense of whether, in this Parliament, the Government are prepared to work with this House on amendments which will improve what they are wishing to do.

As some noble Lords have already said, the context is important here. As my noble friend Lord Whitty pointed out, we face a Government who have carefully crafted a majority of 80 seats over their single-issue election—get Brexit done. But they face two significant problems. Will that consensus continue once Brexit is done? Is there a lasting majority for the sorts of policies and spending plans that will be necessary if they are to retain the votes which were lent to them in parts of the country which have never supported the austerity and anti-welfare policies which were the hallmark of previous Conservative and coalition Governments? Many of the policies in the Conservative and Labour manifestos are similar and, if replicated in policy, we would support them. But we have lived through a curious period in British politics this past five years, with Governments in office but not in power. As a result of that, the Opposition have held a great deal of leverage, in the sense that the Bills which have come forward—there were very few of them, in fact—were either uncontroversial or were often amended by the Government to avoid votes in the Commons. A classic is the Trade Bill, already referred to, which left this House with 40 amendments, virtually all of which were put in, or supported by, the Government. I will return to that Bill later.

Like the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leeds, I would like to know more from the Minister, when she comes to respond, about the principles that will underpin some of the Bills which were received from the Government following the Queen's Speech. As the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, said, are we really going to get down to basics on what, at the moment, seem to be fine words and aspirations—proposals for public consumption which will never see the light of day when the realpolitik takes away the rhetoric?

Moving to particular questions, the main driving force behind all this is the withdrawal Bill, which we will see a lot more of next week and the week after. As other noble Lords mentioned, the changes to the Bill,

particularly the deletion of the regression of standards, are the main issue here and I would be grateful to hear from the Government what exactly the current position is. As we all know, the real crunch will come with the free trade agreement, to be negotiated in what looks like a ridiculously tight timetable, before December 2020, but in practice will have to be cleared by October 2020 to allow time for validations and verification.

The list of issues that are up for discussion is too long to go through in detail, but it includes financial services, where there are 26 specific areas and not one third country has yet been able to be judged as equivalent on all those. It includes fisheries, which are on a fast track to be decided by July 2020. It includes data, where we already know there are serious problems with some of the issues to do with homeland security. It includes Northern Ireland: who checks, and what tariffs and processes will be involved to make sure that that works? The free trade agreement itself will have a level playing field section covering environmental issues, labour, state aid competition and much more. We will have to deal with rules of origin. That leaves completely untouched and so far without any real examination the question of how we will maintain our services—the bedrock of our economy.

We have an extensive set of issues about which we have very little detail. The problem is the complexity, because if we add in the prospect of parallel negotiations, mentioned by several noble Lords, with the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, we are asking a great deal, particularly as it seems absurd to negotiate with third parties, all of which will need certainty about what our future relationship with EU is going to be before signing up with us.

Then we add climate change and biodiversity. If we are going to achieve the Government target of zero carbon by 2050, we are told we should already have started: we should have alternative fuels in plan and be thinking about them; we should be re-equipping our industrial infrastructure. Perhaps this is already ongoing. If so, can we have the detail? As we pointed out, we are also committing ourselves to new approaches to defence and security alliances in an ever more uncertain world. Will the Minister, when she comes to respond, tell us how that is going to be achieved? Those are all external or outward-facing activities brought on us because of the change in policy. What about the internal work, which we have been discussing for many years, not much of which seems to have been settled?

To take one example, in BEIS productivity has long been an ongoing consideration. When is that going to get sorted? Then there is training and skills policy, and competition policy. Changes are in place, but where is the legislation? What about the role of regulation, particularly in auditing and other functions? There is a new report out, but again no hint of legislation coming. There is also merger policy and late payments. These are all issues that will materially affect our successful British industry, but we have no detail about what is going to be done by our Government about them.

It is interesting that a lot of the issues raised in the debate today, many more than I have been able to cover in this speech, concern the role of Parliament in all this. One might assume that, with the return of

[LORD STEVENSON OF BALMACARA]
majority government, the status quo ante might prevail; in other words, all decisions will be taken by Ministers and later ratified by Parliament. However, my sense is that this is no longer acceptable. As my noble friend Lord Judd said, it is absolutely crystal clear now that civil society needs to be brought more into the debates, particularly on trade and trade policy. Many of the issues raised by Brexit and this Queen's Speech will bear on that. Why are we being so particularly sensitive about this? The European Parliament has had considerable discussion and debate with civil society for many decades, and even the United States has all its trade policy driven through Congress and the Senate.

The particular question of regression of standards, which I mentioned earlier, has actually been decided, in the sense that both it and the question of the role to be played by Parliament were among the amendments agreed by this House to the Trade Bill that we passed in March 2019. I put it to the Government that a way of opening up a new era of constructive engagement on these and related issues would be to include those amendments in the 2020 trade Bill.

10.08 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con): My Lords, I was struck by something said by the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson of Balmacara. He said that this was an amuse-bouche. I can tell him that I feel as though I have sat through a three-day banquet with 24 courses on each day. I feel that I have a pile of papers here that reflect the assorted menus of that three-day banquet, but I am going to do my best to get through it.

First, I am honoured to close this day's debate following Her Majesty's gracious Speech, and what a debate it has been. It has been wide-ranging, characteristically well informed and, as it should always be for the Front Bench, challenging. I thank my noble friend Lord Gardiner for so ably opening the debate with such a comprehensive speech. As my noble friend noted, this Queen's Speech sets out a path to a stronger and more prosperous United Kingdom, one we shall achieve by being outward-looking to our partners and allies across Europe and beyond.

A number of your Lordships commented on the perhaps improved clarity of the political direction of travel. It is the Government's priority to secure the UK's departure from the EU with a deal on 31 January, but our ambitious programme goes far beyond our exit from the European Union.

We have had a stimulating debate, and I am grateful for the thoughtful questions that noble Lords have posed. I, too, thank in particular the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, for her reflective and very interesting maiden speech. I know I speak for the whole House when I say we shall all look forward to future contributions from her.

I will now try to address various issues raised in the debate, first considering foreign affairs, defence and trade. The United Kingdom's departure from the EU will give us the opportunity to redefine and reaffirm our role as a sovereign independent nation on the world stage. The Prime Minister has already committed to an integrated defence, security and foreign policy

review led by No. 10 to ensure that we focus our combined international assets and efforts as effectively as possible in the national interest. A number of noble Lords raised questions about that, which I will endeavour to deal with later.

Our Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to play a pivotal role in promoting and defending those national interests, and part of that is indeed achieved through soft power. I thought that was spoken to very eloquently by the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, and I share his significant and exciting ambitions. The UK is indeed home to world-class healthcare companies that benefit from international trade—from 2016 to 2018, Healthcare UK supported over £1 billion of export wins in the healthcare sector. I thought the noble Lord raised a very important point.

However, promoting and defending our national interests will include standing up robustly for our values of democracy, equality, human rights and the rule of law, as a global force for good, and that of course includes the protection of freedom of religion or belief. I thought some very pertinent, tangential points were made about that general proposition of international discourse. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leeds had some sage advice which, with all due deference to him, I would say he essentially paraphrased from the national bard of my country, Robert Burns:

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

I think that applies equally to individuals and to Governments.

Perhaps that also echoes the sentiment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, who said that there is a time for listening and a time for discussion. Indeed, my noble friend Lord Lothian said that there is a place for "exploratory dialogue"—an interesting phrase—and that aspect of dialogue was very cogently reinforced by the noble Lord, Lord Owen. All of us accept the wisdom of these observations; none of us has a monopoly on either knowledge or sagacity when it comes to dealing with international discourse, and I think these were very relevant and helpful observations.

Many of your Lordships asked what the UK can do in various challenging situations across the globe. Global Britain is also about our partnerships across the world, and as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a leading member of NATO, the G7 and the G20 and the current chair of the Commonwealth, we will continue to work with our international partners to defend the rules-based international system and resolve the most complex global challenges, from conflict and climate change to human trafficking.

A number of your Lordships understandably raised the matter of the Middle East and Iran. I feel my noble friend Lord Ahmad dealt with these issues exhaustively and comprehensively in his earlier Statement and do not propose to expand on his comments. I think he gave a great deal of information to the Chamber.

More specifically, as raised by my noble friend Lady Anelay, we will show global leadership through our presidency of the G7, through developing a

Magnitsky-style sanctions regime and through hosting both COP 26 and the PSVI international conference. Indeed, my noble friend asked specifically about the Magnitsky sanctions. Secondary legislation will be laid under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 once we leave the EU. This will allow the UK to impose Magnitsky-style sanctions in response to serious human rights violations or abuses.

My noble friend also raised the important matter of the Truro review and its recommendations. The Government intend to implement the recommendations in full.

At a time when trade tensions are high across the world, we will act to support a global trading system based on clear and fair rules. Within three years, we aim to cover 80% of our trade with free trade agreements—starting with the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan—all of which will be negotiated alongside a new trade deal with the EU. I say to my noble friend Lord Howell that we will forge stronger links with that tremendous institution the Commonwealth, which boasts some of the most dynamic economies to be found. Our exports strategy will help the UK to climb the ranks of trading nations by increasing exports as a percentage of GDP. Providing continuity for businesses and consumers as we leave the EU will also be essential.

The UK is a development superpower. Our development work will be key to reshaping our role after we leave the European Union. We look ahead to hosting COP 26, our presidency of the G7 and delivering on our visions for a global Britain.

I think it was the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham who made an important point about children and education. Global Britain is about more than just Brexit and free trade, which is why this Government will continue to prioritise fighting for the rights of women and girls. We will stand up for the rights of every girl in the world to something of inestimable value: 12 years of quality education. A number of contributors speculated on what education can do for women. I certainly suggest that it helps women into the workforce, prevents child marriage and early pregnancy, and boosts household income and economic growth. Since 2015, the UK has supported almost 6 million girls in gaining a decent education. At the United Nations in September, the Prime Minister announced measures to help to get more than 12 million more children—half of them girls—into school.

My noble friend Lady Hodgson raised the important issues of women, peace and security. The UK is a global leader on and champion of these issues and is committed both to reducing the impact of conflict on women and girls and to ensuring that they meaningfully participate in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. However, we recognise that there are challenges, not least the paucity of the number of women at negotiating tables globally. We are certainly aware of this significant and lamentable deficiency.

The UK can and will do much more on conflict resolution, preventable deaths, Ebola and malaria, which the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, referred to. I say to her that the UK is committed to ending malaria and is the second-largest country donor to

that fight. In 2016, the UK committed to spending £500 million a year on malaria control for five years until 2021. The Government remain committed to that target for the full period.

The year 2019 provided an opportunity for the UK to look back on collective achievements of the past—for example, through commemorating the 75th anniversary of D-day, the greatest combined operation in the history of warfare—while cementing our commitment to a safer future through celebrating the foundation of NATO 70 years ago. These events underscore an undoubted truth that it is the first duty of any Government to protect the safety and security of the British people both at home and abroad, and that is a duty which this Government take very seriously.

The noble Lord, Lord West, perhaps unsurprisingly, alluded to that. I would remind him that we have the highest defence spend in Europe and we are the second-highest defence spender in NATO. We are investing in the future of our air power, in the future fleet and in future-facing land capabilities and we are ensuring that the UK can be an undisputed global leader on defence. Perhaps I may also surprise the noble Lord by agreeing that there is a need for long-term strategic thinking and long-term decision-making in relation to defence. The proposed SDSR will be cognisant of that, and I thank my noble friend Lady Helic for her interesting suggestions about what that review should encompass. I think it was the noble Lord, Lord Anderson of Swansea, who echoed that sentiment in relation to the issue.

As my noble friend Lord Gardiner rightly noted in his opening remarks, our brave men and women who defend this country and our nation as well as our national interests are a priceless asset. We will renew our commitment to do more for those who give so much. Our aim is for government, local authorities, the wider public, the public sector, charities, commercial organisations and civil society to all have a role in supporting the Armed Forces community and to introduce help where needed. One of the Government's latest demonstrations of their commitment to the covenant has been the creation of the Office for Veterans' Affairs. I understand that it is the first time that veterans' affairs will have been overseen by a dedicated ministerial team in the Cabinet Office.

Perhaps I may turn to the issues of environment and climate. Many noble Lords cogently and eloquently expressed acute anxiety about the now visible consequences of climate change, and I would suggest that it was a dominant feature of the debate. Quite simply, climate change is one of the greatest challenges confronting the world, and this Government are determined to build on our progress to date and to lead the world in tackling it. We have already legislated to deliver net-zero emissions in the UK, becoming the first major economy to do so. The target will end the UK's contribution to climate change and shows real global leadership ahead of the crucial COP 26 talks, which we are proud to be holding in Glasgow.

We want to deliver on our climate commitments in a way that maximises the economic benefits of our transition to cleaner economic growth, creating high-value green jobs and new business opportunities across the

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

country. Since setting a net-zero target—something I thought the noble Lord, Lord Collins, was a little discouraging about—the Government have set up a new Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and have committed around £2 billion to support clean growth in a range of sectors from transport to industry, as well as publishing our landmark *Green Finance Strategy*, which I think is rather encouraging. We will set out our plans for delivering net-zero emissions over the coming years, starting with an energy White Paper addressing the transformation of the energy system in line with net-zero, and our upcoming legislative programme will prioritise these commitments.

Through the environment Bill we are embedding environmental ambition and accountability at the heart of government through legislative measures to improve air quality, nature recovery, waste and resource efficiency and water resource management in a changing climate. Through the agriculture Bill we will reward farmers for tackling the causes and effects of climate change, and through our fisheries Bill the Government will manage fish stocks more sustainably and protect our waters. We will also ensure that the UK enhances its reputation as a world leader for animal welfare and protection by recognising animals as sentient beings in domestic law and increasing sentences for those who perpetrate cruelty on animals by ensuring that they are subjected to the full force of the law. My noble friend Lady Hooper also spoke very knowledgeably about the Antarctic and Latin America. Those are important areas and there are lessons that we can learn.

I should like to try to deal with some of the specific points raised during the debate. There is quite a wad of material here and I shall see what I can do to try to get through it. Very much on people's minds and first raised by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, then referred to repeatedly by many noble Lords, not least the noble Lords, Lord Jay and Lord Bruce, the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and my noble friend Lady Manzoor, was the issue of DfID. The Prime Minister is responsible for all machinery-of-government changes and, at this point, no machinery-of-government changes have been announced for DfID or the FCO. I remind your Lordships that DfID and the FCO already work well together. There are currently two joint FCO/DfID Ministers and eight FCO/DfID joint units. The departments work together on a range of issues, including cross-government funds such as the CSSF and the prosperity fund, and on implementation of the joint Africa strategy. I was struck by the number of thoughtful, telling and important points made by your Lordships in relation to this matter. I am sure these have been noted.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): I am sorry to interrupt the noble Baroness, but there have been press and Twitter reports, and I think this House deserves some kind of clarity on this vital issue.

Baroness Goldie: I can tell the noble Lord and the Chamber only what I have been given by way of briefing, and that is what I have just repeated. I am not inside the Prime Minister's mind. I do not know what

he is cogitating on the future. It is important that the FCO and DfID perform two distinguished and distinctive roles. As has already been illustrated by working arrangements, there may well be scope for better co-ordination and efficiencies. As far as I am aware, no decision has yet been made by the machinery of government—which sounds a rather Orwellian entity, but that seems to be what it is called.

My noble friend Lady Manzoor asked about the timeline for the integrated security, defence and foreign policy review. That will be confirmed early this year. It will be the deepest review of our security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. My noble friend also called for a meeting between the all-party group and a DfID Minister to discuss the summit. I cannot speak on another Minister's behalf, but I am sure her thoughtful points regarding nutrition and food security are noted and will be given due consideration.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, raised an important issue on nutrition, particularly the summit in Japan in November. He wondered whether the PM would attend the springboard event in July—is that correct? I cannot commit to that—I do not know—but we are working closely with the Government of Japan to ensure a successful summit later this year. We are working on the springboard event in the summer. I cannot commit to timing or pledge names of those who will attend, but I can assure noble Lords that nutrition is a high priority for DfID. We will build on the successful London summit of 2013 and strive to continue our global leadership on nutrition.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, also raised the issue of Saudi arms sales. Additional measures have been put in place to prevent such a breach happening again. All recommendations to grant licences for the export of items to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners will now be referred to Ministers to decide.

The noble Lords, Lord Collins and Lord Stevenson, along with some other Members, asked about ensuring parliamentary scrutiny of free trade agreements. The Government are absolutely committed to transparency and appropriate scrutiny of trade policy. We will ensure that Parliament and the public are given the opportunity to provide input as we take forward our independent trade policy.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, raised issues about Hong Kong with me but then decided not to speak to these, so I am a little constrained in dealing with them at the Dispatch Box, but I will write because I have marvellous answers and I am sure he will enjoy reading them. He also raised the important issue of Yazidis. DfID has committed £261 million in humanitarian support to Iraq since 2014. We support the United Nations Funding Facility for Stabilization, which has completed 235 of 388 projects in Christian areas and 55 of 98 projects in Yazidi areas. I will endeavour to follow up the reference he made to the breach of the Geneva convention and respond to him on that.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, also raised the protests against the Iraqi Government. The UK condemns the disproportionate use of force against demonstrators, including the use of live fire. The right to peaceful

protest and freedom of expression must be respected. Iraqi leaders must take responsibility to stop the violence and hold the perpetrators to account.

The noble Lord, Lord Hylton, raised the issue of Turkish maritime claims in the eastern Mediterranean. It is the UK's consistent position that all maritime boundary disputes should be resolved through dialogue and in accordance with international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We continue to call for de-escalation.

I think it was the noble Lord, Lord Sharkey, up in the corner there, who mentioned Cyprus. The Government's focus remains to support both sides to reach a just and lasting settlement that will benefit all Cypriots, and a settlement continues to represent the most sustainable means of addressing the situation.

There seems to be some dialogue taking place over my shoulder. I had been going to ask for your Lordships' indulgence, because this has been a very extensive debate. I did not think I would be chivvied for going on for 25 minutes or so. Are any last trains or buses going to be missed? I am being told I can go on for two more minutes.

Lord King of Bridgwater: Perhaps my noble friend will allow me to intervene before she has to sit down—if she does have to at this time. In case there is no response on the population issue I raised, will she ensure that the Prime Minister has a copy of today's *Hansard* and of the article he wrote in 2007, in the hope that the Government will follow that through?

Baroness Goldie: Well, that has used up some of my two minutes. I will look at *Hansard*, and I note the point that my noble friend has made.

I have a sheaf of information but I will have to respond to your Lordships in writing. Time has made it impossible. However, with your Lordships' indulgence, I will conclude my comments.

As we have explored throughout the course of the debate, 2020 and the years ahead will be significant for this Government and the country. Our departure from the EU will bring challenges but also new opportunities. This Government are keen to embrace these, and there will be much for us to do to move ourselves forward. The noble Lord, Lord Judd, said that he found some of my noble friend Lord Gardiner's speech mildly encouraging. I take that as high praise and, in turn, feel duly energised. As we enter this new epoch, let us as a country move forward together in a new accord; one conjoined by a desire to work in tandem for the mutual benefit of all.

The Queen's Speech lays out a future vision for the country that will benefit everyone, whether that is through enhanced childcare for our Armed Forces or through robust measures to act on climate change, building relationships with international partners, or ensuring that girls across the world have access to quality education. This Government are ready to start that journey. They have the energy to work unflaggingly in the interest of the whole country and the determination to deliver a dynamic, refreshed and confident United Kingdom.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019: Section 3(5) *Motion to Take Note*

10.33 pm

Moved by Lord Duncan of Springbank

That this House takes note of the *Report pursuant to section 3(5) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019*, which was laid before this House on Thursday 19 December 2019.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Northern Ireland Office (Lord Duncan of Springbank) (Con): My Lords, on 18 December, the Northern Ireland Office published a report, as per its legal obligations, setting out the latest position on progress on six issues: Executive formation, transparency of political donations, higher education and a Derry/Londonderry university, presumption of non-prosecution, Troubles prosecution guidance, and the review of abortion law. Copies of the report were laid in both Houses upon the return of Parliament. This is the seventh and final report to be published in line with our obligations under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

I turn first to the talks and the formation of an Executive. I stress that it remains the Government's paramount priority to get Stormont up and running before the deadline of 13 January. The Secretary of State remains in Belfast today to facilitate those talks. All five party leaders are engaged in the process and our assessment is that it remains possible but challenging for the parties to secure a political agreement before the deadline. If the 13 January deadline passes without agreement, the Secretary of State will fall under a legal obligation to call an Assembly election. An Assembly and Executive have never been more necessary than they are today. I hope that all noble Lords will join me in hoping that the parties in Northern Ireland can find the necessary steps to move this matter forward.

On abortion, the Government are working towards the laying of regulations necessary for a new legal framework for the provision of abortion services in Northern Ireland to be in force by 31 March 2020. Women seeking access to such services in the meantime can do so in England free of charge, with the costs of the procedure, including travel and, where needed, accommodation, paid for by the Government. Arrangements can be made via the Central Booking Service, with details published on the UK Government website.

The public consultation on the legal framework closed on 16 December, and the responses are currently being analysed. As I have made clear on previous occasions, the consultation seeks views on the question of how the framework can best be delivered in Northern Ireland, not on whether this reform should be happening. The Government's response to the consultation will be published in due course. Discussions with interested parties will continue as the regulations are taken forward in line with Section 9 of the Act concerning the 2018 UN CEDAW report.

[LORD DUNCAN OF SPRINGBANK]

On the presumption of non-prosecution and Troubles prosecution guidance, reforming the legacy system in Northern Ireland remains a priority for the UK Government. The Government are opposed to our service personnel and veterans being subject to the threat and reality of vexatious litigation in the form of repeated investigations and potential prosecution arising from historical military operations. The Government recognise the concerns that have been expressed about the way the current system operates in Northern Ireland and are committed to seeking the prompt implementation of the Stormont House agreement proposals on legacy to provide both reconciliation for victims and certainty for military veterans. Any legislation that improves the legacy system in Northern Ireland will need to be agreed by the UK Parliament and have the support of a restored Northern Ireland Executive. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working closely with ministerial colleagues, the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government towards this end.

With regard to the transparency of political donations, Northern Ireland parties are now subject to the same reporting requirements as all other parties in the United Kingdom. That is a significant step forward, but the question of opening up historic records from before 2017 remains a challenge. At a time when threats to elected representatives are all too common, we must be careful that anything we do does not lead to intimidation of members of the public who have donated to parties in the past when rules were different. We will consult with the Northern Ireland parties in due course about any change to this legislation.

On higher education and a Derry/Londonderry university, there has been no formal proposal for the establishment of a university since we last discussed this matter. I am aware, however, of proposals for a graduate school for medicine on the Magee campus in Derry/Londonderry, and I am happy to take questions on that at the appropriate moment hereafter. We are aware that support exists for the extension of further education provision in the north-west of Ireland, and we are also very much aware of the deficiencies that exist in the medical profession in Northern Ireland, all of which can be addressed by these matters.

With regard to victims' payments, in October the Government launched a public consultation on a scheme for regular payments to, or in respect of, individuals living with serious disablement caused by injury in a Troubles-related incident through no fault of their own. The consultation closed on 26 November. Responses are being considered and will inform the final shape of the scheme. The consultation proposed not to make payments to individuals with a criminal conviction directly related to the incident in which they sustained their injury. We will make regulations in this area by the end of January, as is specified in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. The scheme will then be open for applications and will be completed no later than the end of May 2020, as I have previously reported to this House.

On same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships, the Government are under a duty to make regulations to provide for these matters in Northern Ireland by 13 January 2020. On 23 December 2019,

the Northern Ireland Office laid regulations before Parliament that mean that, from 13 January, same-sex civil marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships will be lawful in Northern Ireland. Couples will therefore be able to register their intent to enter into such a union, with a minimum 28-day notice period as required by law. As previously stated, we expect ceremonies to take place during the week of Valentine's Day.

There remain two key issues on which we will consult further before legislating: same-sex religious marriage, and the right to convert from a civil partnership to a marriage and vice versa. Future legislation must, of course, take account of the specific circumstances in Northern Ireland and provide adequate religious protections. The consultations will seek views from religious bodies and individuals on how religious same-sex marriage will be provided for in Northern Ireland, and how protections would be best achieved. We also want to get the right approach on conversion entitlements for Northern Ireland, given the different approaches taken in the rest of the UK. The Government hope to launch short consultations on these two issues from mid-January and will bring forward regulations as soon as practicable thereafter.

In conclusion, I reiterate the Government's support for the ongoing talks in Northern Ireland, which we are all clearly and very timelessly aware of. I also note that this will be the last report in this sequence as expected via the previous obligations. I hope that these reports have been useful in generating debate and casting a light on some of the issues affecting Northern Ireland.

10.40 pm

Lord Morrow (DUP): My Lords, it would take more than five minutes—the allotted time—to cover all the issues that need to be covered on this vast subject. I am going to focus on abortion, and the steps that the Northern Ireland Office has taken to implement Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

It is well known that I strongly opposed the introduction of Section 9. It remains my view that it was completely wrong of the 2017-19 Parliament to override the devolution settlement, in the way that it did last summer, to introduce widespread access to abortion in Northern Ireland, thereby shredding the Belfast agreement. The process through which this was allowed to happen was shambolic. I sincerely hope that we will never again see it in this or any future Parliament.

How legislation is introduced and scrutinised matters. This Act is a great example of precisely how it should not be done. We had hugely controversial amendments on abortion tacked on to a piece of emergency legislation which had nothing whatsoever to do with the subject. We had no consultation conducted on the contents of the amendments. We then had a rushed legislative process, marked by chaos and confusion, in which the abortion text inserted in the Bill in the other place was completely rewritten by your Lordships' House. The final version of Section 9 was ultimately debated only for a paltry 17 minutes in the other place before it became law. Of course, if the Executive had reformed

by 21 October, this poorly drafted and badly thought-through legislation, which bizarrely—and completely unnecessarily—contains a limbo period of over five months between the two legal regimes, would never have come to pass. However, to my deep regret, the Executive did not reform, and Section 9 is now the law governing abortion in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Office, in seeking to uphold its legal obligations, has run a consultation on a new set of regulations. I am grateful that the NIO sought to run a consultation, although, as I could point out, it was a deeply flawed one. Before I turn to that, however, I want to pose some specific questions to the Minister about the current limbo period in Northern Ireland. This situation will pertain until 31 March 2020, when the new regulatory framework comes into force. Until now, the Northern Ireland Office has dismissed questions about the current legal situation with vague generalisations.

First, can the Minister clarify for the House that it is in fact legal for women to purchase abortion pills online in Northern Ireland without restriction at the current time? I would value his comments. While it may be an offence under the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 to provide such prescription medications, it is not illegal to take them in Northern Ireland any more. Additionally, can the Minister make it clear that there is no restriction currently in place as to where these pills can be taken, unlike in Great Britain?

Secondly, it remains unclear to me which criminal statute criminalises nonconsensual abortions in Northern Ireland in the absence of Section 58. I remain particularly concerned about the practice of placing noxious substances in the food or drink of pregnant women without their knowledge for the purpose of ending their pregnancy. In cases of this that have gone to court in the UK, the law that has been cited to protect women is Section 58. I raised this matter with the Minister when we debated these matters on 17 October. He responded by saying:

“I listened with some interest to the notion of noxious substances, raised by the noble Lord, Lord Morrow, and the deliberate attempt to abort a foetus by a dominant male administering the process. I note in saying that there are a number of laws in Northern Ireland that would be absolutely applicable should an individual seek to abuse the body of another person in this regard. They carry with them very significant sentences. At present, the law has not been used in this regard, but it certainly could be. There would be no question that somebody could, with some sort of lightness of touch, escape from criminal justice in this regard. I would like to make sure that nobody in Northern Ireland is of the view that there may be secret poisonings that could somehow go both unreported and unaddressed. That would be the wrong thing to take from this debate here today.”—[*Official Report*, 17/10/19; col. 276.]

I was very grateful to the Minister for that response. However, in saying,

“there are a number of laws in Northern Ireland that would be absolutely applicable should an individual seek to abuse the body of another person in this regard”

he did not tell us which laws he had in mind. I sincerely hope that he was not thinking of Sections 23 and 24 of the Offences Against the Person Act because, while these provisions are relevant, they do not provide women the same level of protection that they receive in England and Wales under Section 58.

10.46 pm

Lord Hain (Lab): My Lords, there is no question that the deep divisions over Brexit have poisoned the process of resurrecting devolved government in Northern Ireland. I want, therefore, to make some points pertinent to resolving all this, especially in the light of the series of parliamentary amendments initiated by Northern Ireland’s business community, crucially, supported by all the political parties in Northern Ireland. How often have we been able to say that in recent years?

The remain v Brexit contest may be over but do not be tempted into thinking that the protocol on Northern Ireland/Ireland in the withdrawal agreement gets Northern Ireland’s Brexit-related concerns done. Nobody yet knows what will be required to maintain north-south co-operation and manage trade relationships between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, not least because there will be checks and controls on goods moving both ways across the Irish Sea. Moreover, these will change as the EU-UK relationship develops and if and when the UK secures more free trade deals with other countries.

There are four main requests that business, civic groups and all the parties have jointly put forward, and I ask the Minister to consider these. The first is that the UK Government’s commitment to “unfettered access” be given legal form through the withdrawal agreement Bill. That is first by defining what “unfettered access” means; for example, being able to sell goods to Britain without tariffs, origin requirements, regulatory import controls, dual authorisations or discrimination in the market. Let us remember, this is about UK businesses and UK goods being sold into other parts of the UK.

Secondly, they seek protection for Northern Ireland companies and consumers from the costs of the consequences of any new trade frictions. We should bear in mind that these frictions will arise within the UK internal market and as a direct result of the very Brexit which the majority of people in Northern Ireland voted against.

Thirdly, they ask that the Stormont Executive be consulted by the Government on regulations which could impact Northern Ireland’s place within the UK internal market. Although the protocol requires a vote from MLAs every four or eight years on whether to keep aligned with EU rules or UK ones, full democratic consent is surely a living rather than an occasional requirement. Trade frictions could come about as a result of decisions by the UK Government, not just the EU. Northern Ireland businesses and politicians are asking for the consent of their own elected representatives before further trade frictions are imposed within the UK—that is between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. This is surely not just a reasonable expectation but a basic democratic right for every citizen in the UK.

Finally, they ask the Government to publish an assessment at least every 12 months of any negative impacts arising from the protocol on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and vice versa, and to develop mitigations to safeguard Northern Ireland’s place in the UK internal market. All these measures are intended to ensure that necessary mitigations

[LORD HAIN]

and compensations are in place to protect business and consumers in one part of the UK from any negative consequences of the withdrawal agreement that this Parliament is being asked to ratify.

I recognise that this will be debated next week, but I wanted to flag it up now because noble Lords should be under no illusion: the amendments proposed are essential damage-limitation devices and impinge upon the prospects of getting Stormont resurrected. In light of all this we have not only an obligation to listen but a duty to act, and I ask that the Government consider these all-party Northern Ireland amendments, which are now on the Commons Order Paper, very carefully this week because they will be tabled next week in the Lords, not least in the context of resuscitating Stormont and, crucially, giving it the kind of economic stability it needs for a long-term future.

Finally, I say to the Minister that if the Secretary of State sets a deadline—which is, as he said, in law next Monday—it has to be kept. Deadlines are there to be kept, unless there is agreement to move forward and major concessions are made; otherwise, deadlines carry no credibility at all and could hinder rather than enhance the prospect of getting Stormont resuscitated. I speak from experience, in 2005-07 in particular, and I urge him to consider that.

10.50 pm

Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown (DUP):

My Lords, the Secretary of State extended the period for Executive formation to 13 January 2020, a few days from now. Negotiations are taking place, and it seems that Sinn Féin still has its list of demands for the return of devolution. Sadly, this House and the other place yielded to some of the republican demands by casting aside their so-called cherished Belfast agreement to appease the whims and wishes of Sinn Féin. Backdoor legislation was fast-tracked through the Houses of Parliament to impose abortion and same-sex marriage on the people of Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill was rushed through all its parliamentary stages, casting aside the normal practices of consultation, and showed total disregard for the devolution settlement that was lauded by so many in this Chamber. In the other place, one of the Conservative Members said that the way issues had been handled was

“unconstitutional, undemocratic, legally incoherent and utterly disrespectful to the people of Northern Ireland”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 18/07/19; col. 994.]

I concur. Such changes were pushed through, simply tagged on like a dog’s tail to legislation that had nothing to do with these issues that deeply affect the people of Northern Ireland and their religious convictions.

It is abundantly clear that the vast majority of even this House put abortion and same-sex marriage ahead of democracy. In relation to same-sex marriage, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has recently confirmed that a series of legal changes will be made to coincide with the introduction of same-sex marriage. When will the elected representatives here in Westminster see these recommended changes? Will they be consulted on and debated openly? He said that public order law

will be amended to underline that criticism of same-sex marriage is not an offence. When will these amendments be known and debated, or does debate no longer matter even in a democracy? He also said that equality law will be amended so that religious bodies and staff cannot be sued for declining to take part in a blessing or other event marking a civil same-sex wedding. Changes will also protect the ability of religious organisations to dismiss a staff member who enters a same-sex marriage if that is incompatible with the organisation’s values. Can the Minister inform us of the details of these changes and when they will be brought into force?

The Secretary of State also said that he is in discussion with the Northern Ireland equalities bodies about guidance for employees and schools to make it clear that beliefs and opinions about marriage should be respected. Can the Minister tell us when these discussions began and what guidance has been given by the Government to the equality bodies, which in the past have certainly had their own agenda? He also said that additional legal changes will be required to protect ministers of religion and places of worship from being obliged to facilitate same-sex weddings. When will these changes be made? Why has the Secretary of State not yet met the moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church to discuss these issues, a meeting the presbytery has requested?

In the light of all these changes, does this whole saga not prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the legislation was rushed through to appease Sinn Féin, irrespective of the consequences felt within the whole community? This is a disgraceful way to legislate for a part of the United Kingdom.

It has been said that the proposed law could allow unrestricted abortion up to 12 or 15 weeks, with abortion for social reasons up to 22 or 24 weeks; there would be no requirement for a doctor’s approval; any registered healthcare professional could perform an abortion; abortion on grounds of disabilities could be allowed up to birth; no prohibition against sex-selective abortion; and abortions would not need to take place in a hospital or clinic. Are any of those misunderstandings of the legislation? If so, can the Minister clarify them? If not, can he not see how repulsive that is to the majority of the people of Northern Ireland?

I make it clear that I believe in devolved government but not at any price. Sinn Féin has to realise that there must be respect for both traditions in Northern Ireland. We have an intolerable situation in the health service. Health workers and nurses do not receive parity of pay with the rest of the United Kingdom, yet the Secretary of State could have granted parity of pay and allowed the health service to face the many winter pressures with staff knowing that they are appreciated and fully supported by the whole community, rather than making them a pawn in the political talks game.

Devolved government is being hindered because of the Irish language Act—a language that only 0.2% of people in Northern Ireland can speak fluently. The vast majority of people have no stomach for such an Act, especially when the sick are dying, the elderly are lonely and seem forgotten, those suffering mental health are neglected and poverty continues. The education

of our children is being undermined through the lack of finance, yet Sinn Féin simply wishes to weaponise the language for mere political advantage, to the detriment of all.

Finally, if an election is called, the DUP will not be afraid of the exercise of democracy, and I believe that it will gain the confidence of the vast majority of the unionist population in Northern Ireland.

10.56 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, the great majority of the Members of both Houses of Parliament supported the legalisation of abortion and same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, and I applaud the Minister's early remarks about the steps, including the preliminary steps, that the Government are taking to make it possible for women there to access abortion rights. The noble Lord, Lord McCrea, referred to democracy, but of course at the moment we are facing the absence of a devolved Assembly, and it cannot be right that human rights and the capacity to resolve burning injustices in Northern Ireland are simply suspended because no political institutions are operating in the Province.

Another area where we face a similar crisis is higher education, and I wish to press the Minister somewhat further on that. We had debates last year on higher education provision in Northern Ireland, with which there is a general problem. There is far too little of it at the moment. There is a big outflow of students from Northern Ireland simply because there are insufficient higher education places in the Province. In the last year, 17,440 Northern Ireland students—28% of all students there—studied in England, Wales and Scotland. As I know from my conversations in Belfast and Derry, many of those students study outside Northern Ireland not by choice but simply because they cannot access the places that they want in Northern Ireland. This is doing huge damage to the society and economy of the Province. Two-thirds of students who study elsewhere in the United Kingdom do not return after graduation, so this situation is leading to a systemic outflow of some of the most talented people in Northern Ireland. They never come back simply because the politicians there have not been able to agree on a satisfactory level of higher education provision.

The situation in Derry is particularly serious because there is no dedicated university for the second city in Northern Ireland. As your Lordships know, the big debate about higher education provision in Derry goes back 60 years. However, far from getting better, the situation is getting worse. Commitments given in the last 10 years have not been met. The number of places available to students in Derry at the Magee campus of Ulster University is pitifully small. There are only 3,429—barely more than were available 10 years ago. The medical school, which we have debated in the House several times, is not proceeding. What now needs to be done to give it the consent required to make it possible for people to undergo medical training in Derry, which does not happen at present?

The finances of the University of Ulster are clearly in a shambolic state. The proposed new campus in Belfast, which is almost certainly located in the wrong

place anyway, is more than £100 million over budget and more than three years late in delivery. To cap it all, the vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster has just announced that he is departing for Canberra after only four years, so the university is now without a strategy, without leadership, with a massive deficit, and not providing places in the second city of Northern Ireland, which desperately needs them.

Given the enormous damage being done to the life chances of young people in Northern Ireland, particularly in the city of Derry, I consider this situation as big an infringement of human rights as the issues relating to abortion and same-sex marriage about which we legislated last year. I do not believe it is satisfactory for Parliament, which is responsible for safeguarding the human rights of the people of Northern Ireland, to allow it to continue. I seek a commitment from the Minister that, if devolution is not restored in the immediate future, as we all hope it will be, the Government will come forward with concrete proposals for boosting higher education provision in Northern Ireland in general and, in particular, for an action plan to ensure medical places this year in the Magee campus of the University of Ulster in Derry, and proposals for a dedicated university for that city.

11.01 pm

Lord Hay of Ballyore (DUP): My Lords, I am sure that all political parties in this House want to see the devolved institutions restored in Northern Ireland. Let us all hope that an accommodation can be reached to restore the institutions in the next number of days. However, whatever accommodation is reached, it must be fair and balanced. It cannot be a situation where one party takes all.

Three years from the collapse of the previous Executive, people have a right to be angry and frustrated at the absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland. As my noble friend Lord McCrea has indicated, we have only to look at our health service, which is in a critical mess. We have health workers—thousands of them—coming out on to the streets because of the whole issue around the imbalance of pay between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Our education system is suffering greatly. We have only to speak to our educationalists across Northern Ireland, to speak to many of our principals in schools and colleges, to learn that all their budgets are in the red by thousands and thousands of pounds. It is so bad in education that schools cannot afford even to buy toilet rolls. They expect the parents of children at these colleges and schools to pay some money towards resources. This just cannot continue.

There needs to be a resolution, but not specifically around education, health, economic development, inward investment or job creation; all areas are suffering from the lack of an Assembly. One area where there is severe suffering is mental health provision. More people have died since the Troubles through suicide than died during the Troubles. That figure is a dramatic but true representation of what is happening to mental health in Northern Ireland. We urgently need more investment in mental health. Northern Ireland has a much higher need than the average across the United Kingdom and the need is certainly growing.

[LORD HAY OF BALLYORE]

The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, touched on higher education in my own city of Londonderry. He has visited Northern Ireland on several occasions and has visited the city as well. I know that he has met nearly every political party in the city. Unfortunately, however, he has not met the largest unionist party in the city. When he comes to the city again, we as a party would be keen to meet him and talk to him about the future of higher education in the city. He is right: this issue goes back well over 50 or 60 years. There is a long drawn-out debate about whether the university should have been in the city or in Coleraine. Coleraine built the university; the city did not. But it would be wrong to say that the city does not have a university. The city of Londonderry does have a university. All right, there is a cap on the students that can go there, but for any viable university there is a huge economic off-spin for the city.

We have the whole issue around the medical school in the city. Once again I am told by reliable sources that this cannot move forward without ministerial approval. The business case is done. It is sitting there and ready to go. A lot of work has been done through the two universities, Queen's and the university in Londonderry, but nothing can move without a Minister. It is important that the Minister clarifies that position again.

I believe there is a notion across Northern Ireland that with the Assembly up and running all the ills in Northern Ireland will be solved. That will not be the case, but it would certainly help if we had local Ministers in charge taking local decisions on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. Let us hope that these talks are successful as we move forward over the next couple of days.

11.06 pm

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab): My Lords, I do not think it will come as any surprise to the Minister that I am here to resume our exchanges on the future of the welfare mitigation scheme, which were so rudely interrupted by the general election. Now that is behind us, it is imperative that we have some clarity on the future of the scheme. Following the debate on 28 October, the Minister wrote to me expanding on his response. Grateful as I am for his more detailed explanation of the Government's position, I am afraid that it only underlines that position's inadequacies.

I believe there is a consensus that the mitigations package continues to be necessary because of the differential impact on Northern Ireland of a number of key social security restrictions introduced since 2010. The package will be "sunsetting"—to quote the Minister's letter, but is "sunsetting" really a verb?—at the end of March unless there is an Assembly in place to legislate for its continuation. As much as we all hope that current negotiations will be successful, although I am told the omens are not looking good, it would surely be foolhardy to bank on there being an Assembly in place in time to pass this legislation.

The alternative is what the Minister called

"delivery options for providing top up payments in lieu of the present mitigation scheme",

which are being looked at by the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland. However, these top-up payments turn out to be no more than our old friend discretionary housing payments, which all concerned agree are totally inadequate, not least because, as it says on the tin, they are discretionary. Furthermore, there are various restrictions on DHPs relating to both the amount and the length of time for which they can be paid.

The Government's own report, required by the law that we are debating today thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Empey, spells out the implications of their discretionary status:

"Discretionary Housing Payment provision would not be an extension of the existing welfare mitigation schemes. This is primarily because it requires an application from the claimant and it is a discretionary scheme, which means that a payment cannot be legally guaranteed. This provision would only be available for claimants affected by the Social Sector Size Criteria and the Benefit Cap. In the continued absence of the Assembly, the Department for Communities is now taking the necessary steps to prepare for a possible extension of the existing welfare mitigation schemes should appropriate legislation be made. Simultaneously, the Department is working with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on preparatory work to broaden the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme."

This is crazy. How much Civil Service time is being wasted because the Department for Communities is having to prepare for two possible scenarios, little more than two months away, because of the Government's refusal to act? How does it make sense to jettison a cost-effective scheme for one that will be much more costly to manage? More importantly, how much anxiety is this causing well over 30,000 low-income citizens of Northern Ireland, many of whom will be living in vulnerable circumstances?

I repeat: 31 March is little more than two months away. We need a clear commitment to action now, in the event of a functioning Assembly not being in place in time, so that both low-income citizens and civil servants can be secure in the knowledge that the mitigations scheme will be extended. I am sure it would be possible to take a one-clause Bill, with a tightly drawn long title so that it cannot be turned into a Christmas tree for wider amendments, through Parliament quickly, but we need a clear commitment to this without further delay.

In conclusion, will the Minister now acknowledge that the only alternative to the mitigations scheme is the wholly unsatisfactory discretionary housing payments? Will he therefore commit to go away and discuss with colleagues what can be done to guarantee now that, one way or another, the mitigations scheme will continue after the end of March? Will he undertake to report back to your Lordships' House quickly? This, too, is a question of human rights, because the right to social security is a human right.

11.10 pm

Lord Browne of Belmont (DUP): My Lords, as we start a new decade, the 2020s must be about restoring stable devolution in Northern Ireland, where the Executive are committed to building a successful Northern Ireland. During the recent election, the majority of people on the doorstep made it abundantly clear that they wanted their politicians to focus on delivering better public

services. The ongoing crisis in the Northern Ireland health service, for example, highlights the urgent need for the full restoration of the devolved Assembly with executive Ministers in place to take urgent decisions.

No issue supersedes healthcare, both in its importance and in the scale of its impact on every single person. Since the Assembly ceased to function, waiting lists have continued to grow and the pressure on hospitals and hard-working front-line staff has increased. In fact, I am sorry to say that the health system in Northern Ireland is no longer fit for purpose and urgent reform is now required to protect front-line services. Indeed, it is clear that we have reached a critical moment when it has been clearly stated that patient safety may be at risk. Faced with such stark warnings, politicians must not allow any further drift.

Education in Northern Ireland is also under huge pressure. Teachers and staff in schools across the Province have been doing an incredible job at a difficult time, when their budgets are being squeezed. Wherever children come from, and whatever their background or financial circumstances may be, we want them to have the opportunity to succeed. These objectives can be achieved only when a new Northern Ireland Executive are formed. On a number of occasions over the past three years in your Lordships' House, I along with other noble Lords have warned of the ever-increasing backlog of key decisions which, in the absence of a functioning Executive, have had to be postponed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Often these relate to the allocation of resources and the prioritisation of spending, matters that are crucial to the proper functioning of all public services.

Turning to legacy issues, I welcome the recent commitments made by Her Majesty's Government in relation to the full application of the Armed Forces covenant across the United Kingdom. This is especially important in Northern Ireland given the number of people who served throughout the Troubles. Many are still living with the consequences of our troubled past, and in Northern Ireland they have not had the same level of access to services as in other parts of the United Kingdom. I also welcome the Government's promises that legacy issues will be dealt with fairly, so that ageing veterans will no longer have to prepare for a knock at the door to inform them of a reinvestigation of events that took place 40 or 50 years ago. To drag veterans through the court system in these circumstances is clearly unacceptable.

Turning to how Brexit will affect Northern Ireland, both my party and I fully support the UK's forthcoming withdrawal from the European Union at the end of the month. We recognise that the Government have a clear mandate to deliver this under the terms set out in the withdrawal agreement. However, the terms of the UK's future trading relationship with the EU will not be agreed until the end of the year. I have some concerns regarding any special arrangements for Northern Ireland that may be specified in the final trade agreement. I hope that significant special arrangements will not be required, but to the extent that they are necessary it is important that the principle of consent at the heart of the Belfast agreement should be maintained. We shall continue to work with the Government to seek assurances and a commitment in relation to this.

It is vital that the future relationship between the UK and the European Union will allow us to move forward and prosper as one nation, sovereign and equal. To achieve this objective, it is important that Northern Ireland should be represented along with the other countries and regions of the UK when negotiations begin in earnest to agree a future trade deal. We must ensure that this deal with the European Union, and indeed any trade deals agreed with other nations, will benefit Northern Ireland in line with the entire United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland has been deprived of devolved government for three years. My party, the Democratic Unionist Party, stands prepared to form a new Executive so that new Ministers can take the necessary key decisions. Restoring a sustainable and fully functioning Government in Northern Ireland has to be a priority. Public services must not continue to suffer. My party will continue to approach the current talks process with a clear focus and a determination to restore the Stormont Assembly and Executive. I remain optimistic that there will be a positive outcome to this process. Much work has been done, and some has yet to be done, but to achieve a positive outcome the parties must work sensibly together in the interests of everyone across Northern Ireland's society.

11.16 pm

Baroness O'Loan (CB): My Lords, I want to address the abortion consultation conducted by the Northern Ireland Office and reported on in this report. Because of the way that the legislation was enacted, against the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland and propelled by Members of the other place from England, Scotland and Wales—none from Northern Ireland—this was a profoundly important consultation. The regulations will be presented to Parliament and be incapable of being changed, by virtue of their format. They can only be rejected in their totality, not amended; therefore, their content will be of the utmost significance to the people and, more importantly perhaps, the unborn babies of Northern Ireland.

Like many others, I have deep concerns about how the consultation was conducted, with a six-week period granted, during which the general election was taking place. I note the Government say that there was a high level of consultation; it would be helpful if the Minister could tell us how many respondents there actually were. No special effort was made to make the consultation accessible, despite the way in which the law was passed. The consultation document was available online to those who use the internet. If you did not use the internet the instruction was to email the NIO—do you hear that, my Lords?—asking for a copy of the document. You could not phone and ask for one. If you could not access a computer or suffer from a disability which restricts mobility or eyesight, or causes literacy difficulties, there was no obvious special provision. There was no publicity after the initial announcement. One could be forgiven for thinking that the Government were not overeager to receive responses.

The Government are of course required to introduce new regulations to legalise abortion only in limited circumstances. Those circumstances are described in

[BARONESS O'LOAN]

the CEDAW report and in the Act. They refer to cases of threats to the woman's health where the threat does not need to be permanent or long term, to pregnancy resulting from rape and incest, and to pregnancy involving severe foetal impairment, including fatal foetal abnormality—whatever this means. The Government are also required to ensure appropriate and ongoing support, social and financial, for women who decide to carry such pregnancies to term. There was no invitation in the consultation to consider how such support might be delivered.

What deeply shocked me is that, despite their stated commitment to devolution, the Government now propose, through the consultation, to needlessly undermine devolution to a far greater extent than Parliament requires. There is no requirement in Section 9 to introduce abortion on request for any reason up to 12 to 14 weeks' gestation. That is not required by the CEDAW report but appears to be what is proposed. There was no opportunity in the consultation to answer the basic question: "Should abortion be available on demand?" and simply say no. That question did not exist.

The Government also asked whether abortion should be available to 21 weeks and six days or 23 weeks and six days if

"the continuance of the pregnancy would cause risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or girl, or any existing children or her family, greater than the risk of terminating the pregnancy".

The document did not define or qualify that risk, even where the pregnancy might be a threat to the health of family members. It did not even define "family members"—grandmothers, aunts, husbands, someone living with their extended family? This is effectively planning for abortion on request. I have seen no evidence in England and Wales of an application for an abortion on ground C ever being turned down, certainly in the past 10 years.

Most shockingly, question 4 asked whether abortion should be available up to birth

"where there is a substantial risk that the fetus would die ... in the womb ... or shortly after birth"

or

"would suffer a severe impairment, including a mental or physical disability which is likely to significantly limit either the length or quality of the child's life."

Yet under the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, it is an offence to terminate the life of a child capable of being born alive despite a disability.

There was no definition about what constitutes severe impairment, yet people were asked to respond on that basis. In England and Wales, 90% of babies with Down's are aborted at birth. Many conditions might significantly affect the length or quality of a child's life. It does not mean that the life is not worth living. In effect, this legalises all abortion, including sex-selective abortion and disability-selective abortion. Why is there no attempt to provide protection for unborn babies against discrimination on grounds of gender and disability, and why is there no recognition of the need to protect pregnant women from being coerced into abortion?

Why do the Government suggest that the law on conscientious objection should reflect that in England and Wales, which is inadequate? For those who recognise and acknowledge the harm inherent in the deliberate killing of a child in the womb, there should be a right not to be involved at any stage.

The suggestions in the consultation were invariably lacking in definition. We have heard the reference to registered health professionals, not doctors. Going beyond what is strictly necessary under Section 9 contradicts any assertion that the Government want to uphold devolution in Northern Ireland. The way in which this consultation was drafted reflects a political decision made by the NIO. Yet we are at another critical point in Northern Ireland's political life. Our nurses are on strike again.

Many people in Northern Ireland have protested and argued in many ways since July. The consultation was flawed; it was not accessible. To build law on a vague, flawed consultation lacking in specificity of almost any kind without the necessary impact assessments would be most dangerous. I ask the Minister, the NIO, the UK Government, your Lordships and the other place to have regard for constitutional due process and in drafting regulations, which will of course be incapable of change, to ensure that what is provided does not go beyond what is strictly required by law.

11.23 pm

Lord Rogan (UUP): My Lords, before I address the matters before us, I want to pay tribute to a former colleague and friend who passed away last night. Mrs May Steele JP MBE joined the Ulster Unionist Party in the 1950s and served in many positions for the next seven decades. Her final role was as president of the Ulster Unionist Party. May Steele was one of a kind. I will miss her greatly, as will her family and many friends, both in the Ulster Unionist Party and in the wider Northern Ireland community.

It is always a pleasure to hear from the Minister. However, with the utmost respect, I fervently hope that this is the last time he stands before us with the task of presenting one of these reports. I have no doubt that he will share that sentiment.

As we debate tonight, efforts continue to restore the Northern Ireland Executive. My own party is involved in these talks but, as we all know, what happens next is in the gift primarily of the DUP and Sinn Féin/IRA. Having had the pleasure of visiting various different parts of Northern Ireland over the festive period, I can report that frustration at the failure of these two parties to agree has reached even greater heights. There are several reasons for frustration but primarily, as the report before the House states:

"Northern Ireland's public services are struggling in the absence of local leadership, accountability and decision-making that a functioning Executive would bring."

The noble Lords, Lord McCrea, Lord Hay and Lord Browne, mentioned the situation of the health service in Northern Ireland. Here is an indication of how serious this is. Official figures released in November showed that 108,582 people in the Province were waiting longer than a year for a hospital appointment. That accounted for 35% of the total number of patients on

waiting lists, which stood at 306,180—an all-time high for Northern Ireland and an increase of 8% since the previous year. The situation is considerably worse than anywhere else in the United Kingdom and, with all due respect to the Minister, would simply not be acceptable if it was in any other part of the United Kingdom. As has been stated, members of the Royal College of Nursing will go on strike in Northern Ireland for the second time tomorrow, with UNISON members in healthcare positions following suit on Friday. Given the lack of a devolved Administration in Northern Ireland, one might think that Her Majesty's Government might have chosen to make an Oral Statement in this House and the other place to bring the country up to date, but no. Was doing so even considered?

I could go on and on, but time is not available. I will therefore come straight to the most important point. The withdrawal agreement that the Prime Minister negotiated with the EU threw the people of Northern Ireland to the wolves. Despite his repeated public denials that he would treat the Province any differently from the rest of the UK after Brexit, he has chosen to do exactly that. There will now be a trade barrier down the Irish Sea and higher costs for consumers and businesses. The Prime Minister chose to renege on his promises, repeated many times, that Northern Ireland would not be treated differently from the rest of the kingdom. But there are no votes for him in Northern Ireland. I am sorry to say that, with the exception of a small number in the Conservative Party in the other place, its Members now care little about Northern Ireland.

Despite the differences in areas that will be familiar to your Lordships, one subject that unites Northern Ireland politicians is their utter distaste for the Prime Minister's wretched Brexit deal as it affects Northern Ireland. Those involved in the Stormont talks can do little about that now, but they—and the DUP and Sinn Féin/IRA in particular—can come together to agree a path through the impasse and restore devolution. At least then the people of Northern Ireland will have the chance of the better lives that those of us involved in the Good Friday agreement 22 years ago sought to secure for them.

11.27 pm

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for bringing forward these reports. He is doing so at the behest of this House, as he has had to do on several occasions. He has done it with considerable commitment in terms of detail and update. All noble Lords appreciate this; it helps the sense of engagement which we have asked for and which the Minister has applied himself to.

The reality is that the biggest affront to democracy is the lack of an Assembly in Northern Ireland. At a meeting of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I said that the politicians of Northern Ireland had effectively let the people down. One or two Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly who were attending took offence at this, but I challenged them to explain how they could not say they had let the people down. In many ways, the one bright spot of the UK election for my party and for people sharing my perspective

was the result in Northern Ireland. Even from outside you can see that people in Northern Ireland were saying: "We have had enough of this and we are voting in greater numbers for parties which are not the two polar extremes but in the middle in one way or another, because we want this issue resolved." If the DUP and Sinn Féin do not hear that, I suggest that they will drop below a combined share of 50% at any coming election.

I pick up a point made by the noble Lord, Lord Hain, that the deadline is Monday. I ask the Minister whether my understanding is correct: if an Assembly and an Executive are not formed or committed to by Monday, do we require primary legislation to avoid an election, or is an election required otherwise? I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Hain, that we cannot let this run on. There is no justification for anything other than an agreement, for very temporary, short-term purposes, to enable everything to be resolved and for the Assembly and Executive to get up and running, otherwise there must be elections as the only way to resolve it. If that were to be in primary legislation, I think there would be a lot of resistance to it, but it would be good to have some clarification.

A number of Members, including the noble Lords, Lord Hay, Lord Browne and Lord Rogan, spoke about the crisis of public services in Northern Ireland, which is absolutely shocking. It includes education and, desperately, health services. Nurses have been driven to strike and, anywhere else in the UK, the waiting lists would have people demonstrating in the streets. It has been suggested that the situation is putting health at risk. I think it categorically must be true that people are dying in Northern Ireland because of what is happening. If people are waiting that long, by the time the appointment comes around they are no longer waiting, because they have gone. It is crucial that this Assembly gets up and running and that public services are engineered and supported. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Hay, that the situation is not going to be resolved overnight but we cannot go on like this. We need to be sure that we can start to rebuild the practical business of government and politics in Northern Ireland.

The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, mentioned higher education, particularly in Derry, but across the Province. I have also raised this issue, having visited Derry. The building for the medical school is available and the university there is desperately keen to get started. It cannot happen immediately, but all these things are simply waiting in limbo. I suggest that we hope that we will not be here again, and that Northern Ireland business will be decided in Northern Ireland by the elected politicians of Northern Ireland. The only thing I hope we will be here for is a Statement in the next few days to say that progress has been achieved, a breakthrough has happened, and an Executive will be formed. I accept that there will then have to be engagement between the UK Government and the new Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland to try to help get things up and running and probably provide some emergency support.

The other issue is Brexit. It is crucial that if Brexit happens on 31 January and there are no elected representatives in Northern Ireland, with civil servants who have no leadership, the impact will be catastrophic.

[LORD BRUCE OF BENNACHIE]

It will be bad enough as it is. The Prime Minister calls what he has negotiated a deal. It is not a deal, it is an agreement to withdraw in order to start negotiating a deal, but under the arrangement he has negotiated there will be massive administrative costs facing businesses in Northern Ireland and they are going to need advice, help and support. There will be other implications as well, so it is crucial that we have functioning institutions of government in Northern Ireland that can deliver what the people of Northern Ireland are clearly demanding, and the two largest parties really do have to deliver.

11.33 pm

Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab): My Lords, the hour is late—perhaps too late to be discussing these grave and weighty matters. Like the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, I hope that next week the Minister will be at that Dispatch Box making a Statement about the success of the all-party talks in Stormont.

All the contributions noble Lords have made this evening have centred on what effectively should be devolved issues: whether it is the state of the health service, which is grave; whether it is higher education in Derry/Londonderry, which my noble friend Lord Adonis referred to; whether it is education generally; or whether it is abortion or same-sex marriage, which could have been resolved by the Northern Ireland politicians had an Assembly been up and running. All these point to the fact that the most crucial issue facing not just Northern Ireland but the United Kingdom at the moment is what is going to happen in Belfast this week.

It has always been the case that something was going to stop it—a local government election, a European election, a general election, Brexit. Two of those things have happened. Brexit will happen, presumably by the end of this month, although my noble friend Lord Hain has rightly pointed out the complications and difficulties that will still face Northern Ireland even after the withdrawal Bill has been passed. Of course they are important issues, but the elections—as referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Bruce—have followed a pattern over the last few months, starting with the European elections and then the general election. We now have two SDLP Members and one Alliance Member of the House of Commons. We have a change even in this House, with the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, who made a very good maiden speech this afternoon. Things are changing, and my guess is that, were there to be an election as a result of no Assembly being formed, that trend would continue. I make no comment one way or the other as to whether that is a good thing; I simply say that I do not think it is like it used to be, where each election was an action replay of the election before it. No, things are changing in Northern Ireland, and I hope that the participants in the all-party talks in Belfast are talking about precisely that change.

I do not know what the stumbling-blocks are. I assume that they are what they have always been: the Irish language, the petition of concern and other issues. I have said many times before that, on the language issue, perhaps an independent commission looking into what happens in the rest of the United

Kingdom—in Wales and Scotland, for example—could help matters in Northern Ireland. But none of these things is insurmountable, as they were not insurmountable 22 years ago when the Good Friday agreement was signed. With just under a week to go before the 13 January deadline, I absolutely agree with my noble friend Lord Hain that that deadline has to be adhered to. That is what George Mitchell did with the Good Friday agreement and the other deadlines that followed, because it concentrates not only the mind but the purpose of political parties in Northern Ireland and, indeed, the two Governments which are overseeing these matters.

It is an extremely important week. I think the Secretary of State has done well. He has brought them together in a way that had not happened over the previous months, and we wish him well in the next six days. Even if it means that they have to talk on the weekend before that deadline happens, all of us believe that it is vital we have an Assembly and an Executive up and running and that next time the Minister addresses us it will be with a Statement saying that that has happened.

11.37 pm

Lord Duncan of Springbank: My Lords, thank you for what I hope will be the final instalment of these debates. Again, it has been wide-ranging and thought-provoking. I will seek to answer each of the points raised, but let me quickly state that my right honourable friend the Secretary of State will work through the weekend. I think he will be working through the night to try to bring together those parties for the final step that has to be taken.

The noble Lord, Lord Murphy, is correct to identify the issues that remain divisive, but other noble Lords this evening have pointed out the issues that need to be addressed. Perhaps they should outweigh the reality of what is faced with those other issues that need to be brought together. I will be very clear: the approaching deadline of 13 January is a meaningful deadline. If there is no agreement to form an Executive by the end of that day, there will have to be an election in Northern Ireland. That will bring with it the reality of purdah and various other elements but it will be the necessary step in moving this matter forward.

We have sought to extend the Executive formation period on a number of occasions, which we have discussed over the past few months. This is now the last step of the last stage, and the deadline has to be meaningful. It should crystallise thinking and ensure that for those who are casting an eye over their shoulder at the result of the last election, as they consider what will come next, it may be an issue which I hope they will use to sharpen their thinking in the last few days.

I will try to address each of the issues that were raised this evening as best I can. I will start with the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, and the question of higher education provision in Derry/Londonderry. The issue at the heart of this is a decision taken by the Executive to cap the number of students. By doing so, they created a problem for provision in Northern Ireland, which is one of the principal reasons why so many students from Northern Ireland end up being educated

in the rest of the United Kingdom. That decision needs to be addressed. I have looked with some care at Ulster University's proposal for the Magee campus for the graduate school of medicine. To coin a phrase, I believe that it is oven-ready, and I believe that it could be moved forward in short order. However, it needs an Executive, or other powers, to move it forward. Again, I believe in endorsing the view that that is the only way to ensure the indigenous retention of medical practitioners; indeed, I will look at other academic disciplines as well.

The noble Lord, Lord Hain, brings great experience to this issue. He is right to observe that the amendments proposed in the other place are cross-party and should be given due consideration either there or here when the Bill arrives. We need to be careful in looking at them and recognise where they have come from. It is important to do that very thing going forward.

On the wider issues of health and health provision, education and education provision, and social provision, as I have said before and as noble Lords have echoed this evening, the statistics in Northern Ireland are ghastly. They are dreadful. Nobody else would tolerate that; I am shocked that Northern Ireland does. It is only because of the absence of an Executive and an Assembly, where these things can be debated with the anger they richly deserve, that they have gone unaddressed for so long. That cannot go on. After the point when we have an election, whatever follows thereafter, this will need to be a priority for any incoming Executive or any responsible Government taking action in this area. That will require funding. It will require sensible administration. It will require action and it will require urgency. All those things will need to be delivered, I believe, in the first half of this year.

As to the more vexatious issues, let me start with the question of same-sex marriage. There will be two consultations, one concerned with the religious notions of the ceremony itself. Those consultations are beginning. The noble Lord, Lord McCrea, asked whether the Secretary of State will meet with the Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church. The answer is yes, of course he will. He will meet with other religious leaders on that point because it is important that we ensure that the structures in place are cognisant of the uniqueness of Northern Ireland; Northern Ireland therefore needs to consider that. I hope that when this consultation opens, which I believe will be imminent—I am torn over using the word; you may interpret that as you wish—or very soon, such consultation will happen.

The noble Lord, Lord McCrea, also asked how children will be taught about this matter in school. That remains a devolved matter but we are in touch with the relevant department in Northern Ireland—the Department of Education—to ensure that guidance for schools is appropriate, adequate and measured. Again, that aspect is important. As I have said on this matter on a number of occasions in the past, there will be no compulsion on any individual to breach what they consider to be matters of their own conscience. That will be reflected in any guidance issued in schools and elsewhere, and is part of the ongoing dialogue.

It is important to recognise that these issues have now been broadly brought to rest. On the question of whether that should have been done in the manner

that it was, I do not think that that was the ideal way of doing it either. However, as we have said about health and education and all the other issues, I am afraid that this situation is what happens when there is no functioning Executive in Northern Ireland. It is one of the consequences of that and we are living through it now.

The noble Baroness, Lady Lister, made an important point. At the moment, I cannot make any commitment in advance of the talks concluding on 13 January. I hope that they conclude positively and I hope that out of them will come the urgency of the mitigation measures mentioned by the noble Baroness. I have spoken of these matters personally with her and in this Chamber. I do not believe that they can be left unattended in the new period; progress will need to be made on them. I am afraid that I can give no further commitment on this matter but I commit to returning to the House in due course to provide a full update on it as events progress to the point where I can do so. I am also happy to meet in person on this matter in the interim period, should that prove useful.

On abortion, a number of specific issues were raised. I believe that when we have discussed these in the past, I have sought to answer them. I will try briefly to touch on some of them. The noble Lord, Lord Morrow, asked what law would be cited to protect a woman who was the recipient of a noxious substance administered by an individual to try and bring about the termination of a pregnancy. Sections 23 and 24 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861 apply not just in Northern Ireland but across the rest of the United Kingdom. There should be no instance in which this crime is left unpunished and again I stress that this would be a crime and would be punished.

On the availability and purchase of online abortion tablets and pills, it is an offence to sell these products but of course it is not an offence to buy them. I stress that these items can be bought at present. Under the previous regime, the greatest danger was that these pills would be taken by individuals who then could not seek recourse through the medical profession because they would themselves be guilty of a breach of the law. They were placed in the invidious position of taking substances which are unregulated over the internet, and would not then have recourse to medical practitioners to ensure that the consequences were dealt with in a safe environment. That is different now.

I turn to what has happened during this limbo period. It is important to stress again that there has been a slight uptake in the number of individuals who have come to England to undertake these activities. There has been no registered growth in illegal or back-street abortions in Northern Ireland, and attention has been paid to establish whether that is indeed the case. I believe that the rules I set out on the last occasion covered those matters. There is no free for all or Wild West situation in Northern Ireland. There are rules of law which govern both the practice and the administration of medical attention and so forth. I set those out in my previous statement and I will not repeat them at this moment.

I was very clear that the consultation is not about the issue of abortion in itself, but about the framework for the safe delivery of abortion as was agreed in law

[LORD DUNCAN OF SPRINGBANK]
 here. The consultation itself rightly asks specific questions regarding the nature of that framework and does not pose the fundamental questions which have been raised in the debate. It did not seek to do so and those who wish to augment their answers to the consultation were—

Baroness O’Loan: I think that the Minister may have misunderstood me. I asked if the consultation—I am sorry but I am too tired. Can he please remind me of where he was?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: I was saying that the consultation itself is specific regarding the framework for the delivery of the services themselves. However, if an individual wishes to make a wider point in the discussion, it allows that to happen, although it is not within the scope of the consideration that will result as a consequence.

Baroness O’Loan: My Lords, the point I wanted to make was that I was not saying that I totally rejected abortion; rather I said that it was untrammelled and unfettered abortion on demand to 12 or 14 weeks. This is not what is required by Section 9 of the Act. I apologise to noble Lords, but that was the point: it is not required.

Lord Duncan of Springbank: Again, the point I was making about the framework is that it is not unfettered abortion. It is seeking to apply an established process to ensure the safety of individuals and the administration of the service itself. However, the reality remains that in this limbo period, far from being a Wild West of free practice, because of the absence of the detailed framework, there has actually been a regression in that regard. Individual practitioners have not been offering that service and I believe that they will probably not do so until the guidance is clearly embedded. It is not until the point when the regulations become active that we will see a functioning regime. That is why

I said that during the interim period there has been an increase in the number of individuals who are now aware of the service that is available here in England, along with the support available from the United Kingdom Government to provide both free travel and free accommodation for those who wish to undertake the procedure.

I hope that the issue of the consultation, which I believe is a straightforward one regarding the framework itself, will be considered by the relevant authorities to ensure that what is put in place is fit for Northern Ireland and its unique circumstances and that each of the elements we have touched on in the past regarding fatal foetal abnormalities or issues of rape, incest and so on are considered alongside those of the wider question of the CEDAW recommendations within the wider report. Each of these elements is still broadly part of what we seek to deliver, as we made clear when this was enacted in the latter stages of last year.

I believe that those are the principal issues that have been touched on today. If there are issues that I have not touched on, I am happy to write or to meet personally to try to address any of these, but on that basis I would like to close what I hope will be the final report in this sequence. We then await progress—I hope positive progress—and I would like to be standing here very soon saying that there has been a breakthrough. If there has not been a breakthrough, Northern Ireland has been very badly let down, so I hope I am back on a positive note.

Motion agreed.

Oaths and Affirmations

11.51 pm

Lord Rana took the oath, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

House adjourned at 11.53 pm.

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