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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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# House of Lords

Thursday 26 January 2023

11 am

*Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Durham.*

## Introduction: Lord Sewell of Sanderstead

11.07 am

*Dr Cleveland Anthony Sewell, CBE, having been created Baron Sewell of Sanderstead, of Sanderstead in the County of Surrey, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Mendoza and Lord Godson, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.*

## Manufacturing Post Brexit Question

11.11 am

*Asked by Lord McNicol of West Kilbride*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to support manufacturing in the United Kingdom following the UK's departure from the European Union.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Callanan) (Con):** My Lords, following the UK's departure from the European Union, the Government are focused on transforming our industrial heartlands by attracting inward investment, future-proofing businesses and securing high-wage, high-skilled jobs. We continue to support manufacturing through programmes in strategically important subsectors such as aerospace, automotive and life sciences, and we have committed nearly £650 million to fund the High Value Manufacturing Catapult centres, and nearly £200 million to the Made Smarter programme.

**Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab):** I thank the Minister for his Answer. Trade exports with the EU are down 15% since Brexit; paperwork and delivery times are up, while regulatory divergence, which was heralded as one of the key Brexit benefits, has so far been very limited. As divergence increases, manufacturers see only additional cost, extra paperwork and further disruptions. What further steps is the Minister's department taking to support UK manufacturers, their employees and their supply chains to overcome the frustrations that they face on a daily basis? What does his department's detailed cost-benefit analysis of further and future regulatory divergence show?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** There are tremendous opportunities facing the UK following Brexit. We can have regulatory freedom in a number of areas where we were constrained by the EU. I do not want to cast doubt on the noble Lord's figures, but manufacturing in the UK is doing well. According to Make UK, which is the largest UK manufacturing trade body, manufacturers are continuing to increase investment in the next 12 months, more than half of manufacturers plan to increase investment in both people and training

within the next 12 months, and a further 57% are planning to increase investment in new product development. Manufacturing is doing well. We should not talk it down.

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** When we look to supporting manufacturing industries, is not the immediate question what we are all going to do in the face of rising American protectionism and subsidies, particularly in the motor sector? Are we going to challenge them? Are we going to join with the EU in its enormous plan for subsidies to counter American subsidies, or are we going to do nothing or go it alone?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** My noble friend makes an important point. The Inflation Reduction Act in the US is clearly going to have big effects on the UK and Europe. We need to work together with our friends and partners in engaging with the US to try and convince them that a rise in global protectionism is really not the way to go.

**Lord Fox (LD):** My Lords, if you talk to the trade associations—Make UK for example—they will also tell you that their members and the manufacturing industry are facing massive headwinds: increased costs, broken supply chains, increased paperwork when they try to export to the EU, a shortage of skilled people and a rising cost of capital. They look over the fence to other countries: they see Governments in the European Union and in the US that are seeking to work out plans to help their industries. Then they look here and see empty words and press releases, but nothing behind them. So when are we going to have actual plans, real road maps and proper support?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** The noble Lord obviously wrote his question before I gave the earlier answer, because the figures that I quoted on increased manufacturing investment—more than half of manufacturers plan to increase investment in people and industry—were from Make UK, so the noble Lord is painting an unnecessarily gloomy picture.

**Lord Leigh of Hurley (Con):** My Lords, would my noble friend agree with me, in respect of manufacturing post Brexit, that R&D is a very important part of manufacturing growth? The ONS revised statistics show that research and development in the UK was £33 billion just before Brexit; last year, it was £42 billion. This is in part thanks to the Government's R&D tax credits of £6.7 billion last year. Will BEIS encourage the Treasury to ensure that the scheme to combine SME and larger companies' R&D will not prejudice SME companies in claiming the invaluable R&D tax credits they need?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** My noble friend makes an important point, and I know that he is very expert in this area. The Government are taking steps to increase our international competitiveness, by increasing the research and development expenditure credit from 13% to 20%; we will increase our economic competitiveness in that way. As part of the ongoing R&D tax relief review, I know that the Treasury is looking at this issue carefully.

**Lord Woodley (Lab):** My Lords, Honda closed its factory primarily because of Brexit, when, unlike Europe, we removed those tariffs on vehicles coming in from Japan. Twelve years ago, the Government's Automotive Council, which I had the privilege of sitting on, set aside £400 million—a lot of money in those days—to entice battery manufactures into the UK. It was small change compared to the billions of state money being put in by Germany, China and Japan. So, with respect to the Minister's answer the day before, it is not nostalgic to nationalise Britishvolt; it is strategic, irrespective of the relatively small but very important battery production by some car companies that is taking place now. My question is: if we failed in battery mega factories, what is the Government's strategy now for the industry? Is it hydrogen vehicles or whatever? Without investment and without strategy, we will have no industry in 25 years' time.

**Lord Callanan (Con):** I know that the noble Lord is passionate in his views on this, but I am afraid that I just do not agree with him that nationalising the car industry is the way forward. The noble Lord will have been around in the 1970s when we saw the decimation of the UK car industry under state control. The future is not state control; the future is what we are doing, which is incentivising manufacturers to move to the UK. The case of Britishvolt is very disappointing, but the money that we had available remains on the table. We very much hope that other companies will show interest in the excellent site in Cambois, near Blyth, and we continue to do all that we can to encourage investment in the UK.

**Lord Patel (CB):** My Lords, the Minister mentioned the Government's support for life sciences, and I applaud the Government for their strong support. But recent reports, particularly from big pharma in the United States, suggest that despite the £1 billion investment we had last year, it is now slowing down compared with investment in Europe and the USA. What other encouragement can the Government give to have inward investment from overseas?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** I know that the noble Lord is very expert in this area, and we have discussed it before. We need to do all that we can to encourage life science investment; the UK has one of the most successful life science sectors in the world. We need to make sure that investment continues to flow into this country, and we want to use all the policy levers open to us to make sure that that success story continues.

**Lord Allan of Hallam (LD):** My Lords, why does the Minister think that UK car production has fallen to its lowest level since 1956? Do the Government have plans to invest in particular in the charge point infrastructure that will be needed for the UK car industry to make a successful transition to electric vehicle production?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** The noble Lord makes a good point. We need to do lots of things to help us on the journey to electric vehicles. Charging infrastructure is an important point. We have very ambitious plans to invest in thousands of new chargers, which are being

rolled out. We already have one of the largest charging networks in Europe, but we need to do an awful lot more. In addition, as I mentioned, encouraging gigavolt battery manufacturing plants in the UK is particularly important. There is a lot that we need to do to support our electric vehicle plans.

**Lord Marlesford (Con):** My Lords—

**Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab):** My Lords—

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** My Lords, quick questions and quick answers will mean that both noble Lords will be able to get in.

**Lord Marlesford (Con):** My Lords, Britain has over the decades sadly lost its pre-eminent position in nuclear power. Has my noble friend noticed that Rolls-Royce has today announced a new nuclear academy of excellence in Derby? Will he recognise that this is a real opportunity to move forward with the experience Rolls-Royce has in small modular reactors?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** I completely agree with my noble friend. There is a great future ahead for small modular reactors. We want to support Rolls-Royce as much as we can in this area. We are rolling out support for Great British Nuclear and the SMR programme.

**Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab):** My Lords, I declare an interest as director of Business in the Community, the UK's biggest responsible business network. The fall in manufacturing in the UK since the 1970s has been quicker than almost any other developed country, despite jobs in the sector paying 12% more than equivalent sectors and being seen as key to growth and bringing pride back to Britain. As the noble Lord from the Lib Dem Benches pointed out, it is reported today that UK car production is at its lowest level since 1956. It seems to us that the Government have accepted the decline, so what plans do they have seriously to arrest it? We have not heard enough from the Minister today and we do not hear enough from the Government on this point. We want manufacturing to recover. "Made in Britain" should be a slogan we should all be proud of.

**Lord Callanan (Con):** I certainly agree with the noble Lord's last statement, if not many of his earlier ones. There is always more that we can do. We continue to support UK manufacturing, but the UK is one of the largest manufacturing nations in the world—it is the ninth globally by output. Manufacturing contributed £205 billion of gross value added to the UK economy and supports 2.5 million jobs, most of them outside London, which is a good thing. Of course we always need to look at new policies and regulations. I am sure the Opposition will support our new regulatory freedom to help make things easier for the manufacturing industry, but let us get behind British manufacturing and not be so gloomy.

## Mental Health Act Reform

### Question

11.22 am

Asked by **Baroness Buscombe**

To ask His Majesty's Government what reforms they are proposing to the Mental Health Act 1983.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con):** The Government published their draft mental health Bill on 27 June 2022, which contains our intended reforms to the Mental Health Act 1983. I am grateful to the joint pre-legislative scrutiny committee on the Bill for its report, which was published last week, on 19 January. The Government will now review the committee's recommendations. We will respond in the coming months and introduce a revised Bill when parliamentary time allows.

**Baroness Buscombe (Con):** I thank my noble friend the Minister for his comments on the Joint Committee's report. I had the privilege of chairing its inquiry and I am grateful for the contributions of Members of both Houses. The Government must of course spend time considering with care our recommendations, but as a committee we feel strongly that a Bill should be introduced to Parliament as soon as is practicable to bring about the really important reforms to the mental health system that people so dearly deserve. Will my noble friend give an assurance that the Government will introduce a formal Bill to Parliament in the current Session?

**Lord Markham (Con):** First, I thank my noble friend and all noble Lords who took part in the pre-legislative scrutiny committee. I think all noble Lords agree that what we are trying to do with the mental health Bill is a very good thing. We would like to bring it forward as soon as we can. From my side, I know that we are ready to go, but we are working with the parliamentary authorities to make sure that we can get the legislative time. We want to do it as soon as possible.

**Lord Touhig (Lab):** My Lords, due to the current mental health legislation, autistic people are being detained in hospitals not because they have a separate mental health issue but because they are autistic. Autism is not a mental health condition, but more than 2,000 autistic people are currently locked up. This is a stain on Britain's reputation for defending human rights and a challenge for us to define the liberty and freedom of some of our most vulnerable citizens. So will the Minister ask his noble friend sitting on the Bench with him, the Government Chief Whip, for a debate in government time on this matter, so that the voices of some of these people, some of whom have been locked up for decades, can at last be heard?

**Lord Markham (Con):** I have some personal experience in this space, so I understand exactly what the noble Lord is saying. I think we all agree on its importance. We have a commitment to decrease the number of in-patients with learning disabilities and autism by

50%. It is something that every ICB must have a lead on, so that they can really tackle it, and I personally would be happy to meet the people the noble Lord mentioned to understand further.

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, this process began four years ago, with the then Prime Minister announcing the initial reason for the review, which was the disproportionate way that the Mental Health Act is applied to many black and minority ethnic communities. Beyond the review and the White Paper, the Joint Committee recommends the abolition of community treatment orders, which are disproportionately applied: if you are black you are 11 times more likely to be under a community treatment order. Most of the recommendations of the Wessely review were to be enacted by changes within NHS England. Can my noble friend the Minister assure us that he will hold its feet to the fire to change the culture, practices and training of many of our mental health professionals, because those communities are being disproportionately affected by the way the Act operates?

**Lord Markham (Con):** Yes, I too saw the statistics on the number of black people who are detained. Clearly that is not right and is something that we need to get on top of. I know that the NHS has set up a patient and carer race equality framework to try to tackle this, but clearly we need to act on it. Again, it is the responsibility of every ICB to ensure to tackle this as well.

**Baroness Barker (LD):** My Lords, a key reason why people with learning disabilities and autism are wrongly detained under the Mental Health Act is that mental health professionals are not trained to recognise autism and learning disabilities. Without waiting for legal reform, will the Government work with the professional bodies now to train and retrain psychiatrists and psychologists in learning disabilities and autism so that we can stop the scandal of these people being locked away wrongly for years and years?

**Lord Markham (Con):** Yes, and understanding starts in schools. Again, I am very aware of that, and of the fact that training in schools is vital. We have increased the proportion of schools with trained mental health assessors from 25% last year; it will shortly be about 35%. The target is 50% next year. It is not 100%—we need to do more—but it is rapid progress.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, like other noble Lords who have spoken, I was a member of the scrutiny Joint Committee. I should say in parentheses that I entirely support the legislation being brought forward, but one of the things that came through very strongly from all the evidence we took was quite serious anxiety about resourcing for the kinds of reforms that are required. That is about not just money but, to go to the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Barker, the recruitment of appropriate people to deliver the services that are needed, and the retention and training of those people. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Government will review the resource allocation for the proposed changes to the Mental Health Act, to ensure that these workforce issues are addressed?



**Lord Markham (Con):** The noble Baroness is correct; these things do need resources. We have committed to £2.3 billion of extra spending next year and an increase of 27,000 in the number of mental health nurses; I am glad to say we are well on the way, with a 7,000 increase over the last year. This all comes back to workforce planning—I am sure I will be asked that question later. And, yes, we will publish our plan soon.

**Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB):** My Lords, can the Minister comment on why it is 50 years since we have had a revision, and say whether in fact the Government are delaying this legislation because of the resources that will be required, as has just been referred to?

**Lord Markham (Con):** No, I hope that all noble Lords will see that there is no sense of delay on this side—and we are not waiting for the legislation to introduce a lot of these measures. It is very important, and we are ready to push on as soon as parliamentary time allows.

**Lord Bradley (Lab):** My Lords, declaring my interests in the register, particularly as a trustee of the Centre for Mental Health and a member of the Joint Committee, perhaps I might press the Minister on one of our key recommendations: to establish a statutory mental health commissioner to oversee the implementation of the draft Bill, which we fully support, and to have a laser focus to ensure consistency across the country in the services required, underpinned by investment in community services. Unless those are forthcoming in a timely way, the Bill's intentions will be undermined. Will the Minister confirm today that he will accept the recommendation for a mental health commissioner?

**Lord Markham (Con):** I hope noble Lords accept that the report came out only last week and we need a little time to consider it. What I can say is that we are all focused laser-like on making sure that change is happening in this space. If the best way to do that is by appointing a mental health commissioner, that will have my support. At the same time, I am very aware that ICBs are responsible for this, and I want to give them the space to make sure they can properly manage mental health and other health services in their area.

**Lord Selkirk of Douglas (Con):** Some years ago I visited a health centre with a lot of autistic patients who were quite young. One of them came up to me and said, "What is your favourite film?" I replied immediately, "Chariots of Fire"—whereupon he took me through every detail of "Chariots of Fire", which revealed that in one respect he had a problem but in other respects he had great ability. Does the Minister accept that there is much to be hoped for in young people who have this difficulty?

**Lord Markham (Con):** I agree 100%. As I say, I have some personal experience. In many ways, these children or young people have incredible skills and are gifted in many directions, and the economy we live in, with IT and everything, gives more and more opportunity for these people to thrive.

**Baroness Merron (Lab):** I congratulate the Joint Committee on its excellent work and refer to a report in the *Times* yesterday that the Government have written to universities to ask them to limit the number of medical school places they offer or risk fines. Can the Minister shed any light on what I regard as a baffling move? Can he explain to the House how the Government will address the concerns of the Joint Committee about getting the right workforce in place if they are planning to reduce the number of doctors in training?

**Lord Markham (Con):** Again, I agree that workforce is key to this. I am not aware of the report; I will look it up. I am somewhat surprised, because I know that we all accept that we need to invest in this space to recruit doctors, nurses and mental health professionals.

## Secondary Schools: Autistic Pupils

### Question

11.33 am

Asked by **Lord Touhig**

To ask His Majesty's Government what is their strategy to ensure the needs of autistic pupils are fully met in mainstream secondary schools.

**Lord Touhig (Lab):** My Lords, in begging leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, I declare an interest as a vice-president of the National Autistic Society, an honour I share with my noble friend Lady Browning, who unfortunately cannot be with us today.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, we want to give all children and young people, including those with autism, the opportunity to thrive. The SEND and alternative provision Green Paper published last March set out

"proposals for an inclusive system, starting with improved mainstream provision"

with

"early and accurate identification of needs, high-quality teaching ... and prompt access to targeted support".

We are committed to publishing a full response to the Green Paper in our improvement plan early this year.

**Lord Touhig (Lab):** I thank the Minister for her Answer. Some 130,000 autistic youngsters are educated in mainstream schools. According to figures from the Minister's department, they are twice as likely as non-special needs children to be excluded from school. What is worse, a report by Ambitious about Autism revealed that more than half the exclusions are unofficial or unlawful. The Autism Centre for Education and Research at the University of Birmingham has produced an excellent report on these matters. The authors were due to meet officials from the Minister's department, but unfortunately the meeting has not yet taken place. Will she personally intervene to ensure that this meeting takes place? It will make a difference.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I commend the noble Lord; I know he has worked tirelessly on this extremely important and complex issue of children and adults with autism. I would of course be delighted to go back to the department and talk to my ministerial colleagues to make sure the meeting takes place. I absolutely hear his concerns in relation to exclusions. He will be aware that the department updated our behaviour guidance last summer and stressed the importance of anticipating triggers of behaviour for children with special educational needs, including autism, and making sure provision is available for them.

**Lord Bellingham (Con):** My Lords, the Minister will be aware that a significant number of education, health and care plans for autistic children are being delayed by the failure of councils to recruit enough educational psychologists. Indeed, some EHC plans have been issued without the child in question seeing an ed psych either remotely or in person. What does the Minister plan to do about this problem?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I would be grateful if my noble friend could share details of these cases, so that we make sure we understand them properly. The House will be aware that a diagnosis of autism needs to be a medical diagnosis. We will publish our improvement plan for provision for children with special educational needs. That will clearly cover how we want EHCPs to work better in future; it will be before the House shortly.

**Lord Addington (LD):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for the Answer she gave earlier and remind the House of my interests in the general field of special educational needs. Does she agree that if you are determined to get a medical diagnosis, you are slowing down the process of recognition and help? If we get teachers better trained to give a suspicion—it might be just a suspicion—or some knowledge about the autistic field, we will have a chance of getting better help. If noble Lords think that does not have an effect, look at the numbers of autistic people identified in the prison system.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The noble Lord raises two connected issues. Formal diagnosis of autism in this country needs to be done by a medical professional—a doctor. The noble Lord is absolutely right; that does not need to slow down interventions to support a child where there is apparently autism, even before it is confirmed. The Government announced a contract with a number of leading charities in this area to provide universal training across the teaching workforce in both schools and FE, and 60,000 people have been trained so far since April 2022.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, on this question of diagnosis, which the Minister has referred to, I am sure she is aware that it can take quite a long time before it is even seen to be necessary to seek a diagnosis, that this is particularly true with girls—children and young people up to teenage years—and that, once the need for a diagnosis has been identified, it can take a very long time to get it. Even if you are prepared—some people are, but not everybody

can—to go for a private route to secure that diagnosis, it can sometimes be a year or two, three or four years before that diagnosis can be made. Can she see any way forward to changing that situation?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The whole strategic focus of the improvement plan that we will be publishing in response to the SEND and AP Green Paper consultation is to address the problem we see today of late diagnosis, late intervention and needs escalating; that is absolutely our aspiration. On the diagnosis of girls, we are running two pilots at the moment, one testing new screening tools and the other seeing whether we can adapt existing ones, because we are all aware that four times as many boys are diagnosed as girls.

**Lord Shinkwin (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Sewell of Sanderstead, on his introduction. A more diverse House is a stronger house. I also commend the noble Lord, Lord Touhig, on his long-standing work on autism. Will the Minister ensure that guidance for schools on transgender issues takes into account the Cass interim report finding that approximately one-third of children and young people referred to gender identity development services have autism or other types of neurodiversity?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I thank my noble friend for his question. The data he cites underlines the importance of having a truly skilful and expert diagnosis of the full range of issues a young person is facing before finalising any diagnosis of gender dysphoria. I cannot yet comment on how that will be addressed in the guidance because obviously, we are going to publish the draft and then consult on it.

**Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP):** My Lords, I think it will be widely accepted that the key to providing the appropriate level of support throughout a school career for a pupil with autism—indeed, it needs to be tailored for the individual—is early diagnosis and early educational intervention, leading to sustained support for the pupil. What specific actions will the Government be taking to improve early educational intervention and what additional resources are they prepared to commit to improve it?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I have referred to some of the interventions. I talked about the three-year universal training contract in schools and colleges, which began in April last year. We have funded work on transition—£18 million for supported internships for those with the most complex needs. In addition to that early intervention, we also want to bring clarity to parents, teachers, local authorities and commissioners about what the nationally expected standards of provision are so that it feels like a clear, transparent and fair playing field.

**Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Lab):** My Lords, while I understand and indeed respect the Minister's previous responses on this Question, nevertheless the Government continue to delay the publication of their SEND review consultation response. Children, many of whom will be autistic, will be unable to reach their full potential

[BARONESS WILCOX OF NEWPORT]  
and thrive in appropriate educational settings. These children are being let down. Minister, how much longer will they have to wait?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I think I have already said that the implementation plan will be published early this year.

**Baroness Tyler of Enfield (LD):** Does the Minister agree that some children diagnosed with autism are also experiencing mental health difficulties, and that that is a complex interaction? What training is being given to mental health professionals working in mental health support teams in schools to understand and support autistic children who also have mental health problems?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I may need to write to the noble Baroness on the specifics of the training, but she is correct that we are supporting those professionals to respond and help identify mental health issues early among children in schools.

## Afghanistan: Women

### Question

11.44 am

*Asked by Lord Harries of Pentregarth*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to work with the governments of Islamic countries to persuade the Taliban to allow women in Afghanistan to work with non-governmental organisations.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, the ban on Afghan women working for NGOs is totally unacceptable. I have spoken to my counterparts from across the Islamic world to agree that we must convince the Taliban that these edicts are un-Islamic and contravene all global norms and values. I am encouraged that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is considering initiatives to address this very problem. I shall of course continue to seek practical solutions and work with Muslim-country partners to ensure that Afghan women can continue to work and, importantly, benefit from lifesaving aid.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB):** I thank the Minister for that Answer. When this issue was raised last week by the noble Lord, Lord Singh, the Minister suggested that there might be a way of bending the present rules to allow this to happen. Does he agree that it is essential that some long-term solution for this is found? Could he indicate what work is going on in relation to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar—all countries that have, in the past, had good relationships with the Taliban? Would he use all his much-respected powers of persuasion in relation to these countries to get a long-term solution to this?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, the noble and right reverend Lord is right to raise this issue. As I alluded to, I find it unimaginable—I put it

that way—that the Taliban, with their rigidity and coercion, will back-track on the edicts that they have issued. However, as reported by the Deputy Secretary-General to the UN, we have seen workarounds on ensuring that support on key issues such as health and education is being provided. The noble and right reverend Lord is correct that we are working on that. I assure him of my good offices and those of others. We are working closely with the Islamic countries. I was in Pakistan in October 2022 and I raised this issue directly when I met the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in December. My colleague and right honourable friend Andrew Mitchell met the Pakistani Prime Minister recently at a conference in Geneva. I have recently engaged with Oman, Qatar, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan.

**Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD):** My Lords, I underline what the Minister said: banning women and girls from education and work has no place in Afghanistan or any other Islamic country. It is important that people understand that.

I want to take the Minister back to the meeting that the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, had directly with the Taliban when she led an important delegation last week. One of the outcomes is the prospect of a conference in March for Islamic countries to come together to raise these issues and try to influence the Taliban, because of course they do not speak with one voice. What has the UK's engagement been with that? Would the United States engage with it as well, using its influence in the Middle East? What practical steps can the UK Government take to ensure that it happens?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I believe that that is a good idea. I have engaged directly with the Deputy Secretary-General on the concept. It will be held in the margins of the Commission on the Status of Women conferences that take place in New York. However, I also support, as does the Foreign Secretary, the strong suggestion that it be held within the region to allow for a greater focus on the rights of women and girls, not just in Afghanistan but across the Islamic world, including the issue that noble Lords have often rightly debated: the current plight of women and girls in Iran.

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, this is the third time that we have discussed this issue in the last week, and I think that indicates how strongly your Lordships' House feels about it. I take the opportunity to thank the Minister for his responses, which we broadly welcome; we are grateful that he is involved in this on behalf of the British Government.

The Minister has spoken about engagement with Islamic countries in south Asia and across the Middle East. He will understand how important it is that we work multilaterally across all countries to encourage the Taliban and do everything that we can to reverse this policy. He has mentioned that he has engaged with Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed regarding this conference. What more can we do to



support her in her efforts? She could be a guiding light for all of us in trying to reverse this dreadful and appalling policy.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I thank the noble Baroness for her kind remarks. This policy is draconian and has no basis in any society, and that includes the Islamic world; that has to be made clear. I assure her that it is not just the Islamic world that we have engaged with, but there has to be a particular focus there.

The Taliban have not budged an inch; if anything, they have gone into more aggressive and abhorrent territory. We have seen the ban on girls' education, along with the recent ban on women's participation in NGOs. At the moment they have not gone further than that, but the situation on the ground is very challenging and testing. We are of course working with the UN and with international partners, including the likes of the United States and the European Union. It is important that we send a comprehensive, multilateral message to the Taliban that their actions will be taken very seriously.

As I am being candid, although I think we will not see the Taliban pulling back any time soon, I think the importance of delivering humanitarian aid and of women's health and education should be paramount, and we need to look at practical solutions. In that, the Islamic world is going to be key.

**Baroness Altmann (Con):** My Lords, I commend my noble friend on all the work he is doing in this area. I know how dedicated he is to trying to make improvements wherever he can. Will he join me in commending also the bravery of many of the women across the Middle East, and in other parts of the world, who are standing up and trying to protect the rights of women in those countries?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I absolutely join my noble friend in that. It is important that we see the representation of women across all parts of the world, including the Islamic world, coming to the fore. I am very much encouraged by seeing Ministers being appointed in Qatar and, more recently, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is important that their message is delivered as well, because their sheer presence demonstrably shows that the erroneous interpretation and narrative of the Taliban is fundamentally flawed—it is wrong.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, does the Minister agree that a doubly persecuted group in Afghanistan, and among those who have fled Afghanistan, is Hazara women? Many of them have been judges, lawyers or journalists. They have suffered grievously at the hands of the Taliban and continue to do so. Yesterday, a new report was launched here in Parliament by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hazaras. I want to follow up a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith. The report includes a number of recommendations about what the UK can do. Will the Minister undertake to read that report and respond to the recommendations that have been made to the UK Government?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, perhaps I can go one step better. I am aware of the meeting that took place. First and foremost, I invite the noble Lord, as well as the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, who I know is also involved, to have a direct meeting with me. I have engaged with the Hazara community's representatives here in the UK. While we talk about women's rights, it is also important that we do not lose sight of minority rights within Afghanistan, which are also being suppressed by the draconian Taliban.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** My Lords, we have a virtual contribution from the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours.

**Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, is not the lesson we learned from both America's humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam and, more recently, ours from Afghanistan that foreign interventions which seek to impose our will on others of a different cultural heritage rarely work, and that the wise man seeks a more subtle approach to intervention? In the case of Afghanistan, subtlety demands the use of interlocutors who seek to help, advise, understand, engage and influence but not chastise. Those are very Christian principles. Condemnation and isolation simply will not work.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, first and foremost, I do not think the Taliban will understand the language of gentle persuasion. They are an abhorrent stain on the Islamic world; that is not my assessment but the assessment of many countries across that part of the world. Where I agree with the noble Lord is that we should explore all avenues to ensure that, whatever levers are at our disposal, and working with key partners who have the necessary influence, we change the trajectory that is currently faced across Afghanistan, particularly given the plight of women and girls.

**Lord Kamall (Con):** My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister say what analysis the FCDO has done of the Taliban's emerging or nascent and evolving foreign policy, if any, to be able to identify certain levers and pressure points that it could use to try to nudge the Taliban into solving this issue, which we want to be solved?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, that is why we are working closely with partners across the Islamic world to identify and use those levers effectively.

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB):** My Lords, the Taliban rely on a very extreme interpretation of dated Middle Eastern culture. Does the Minister agree that, if religion is to be a force for peace rather than the main cause of conflict, all religions must embrace the equality and dignity of women, and remove all attempts at propagating the superiority of some and negative attitudes to others?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, I totally agree with the noble Lord about those who follow a faith, whatever it is. To use just three examples, there is the status of mother Mary within the Christian faith, the status of Hazrat Khadija, the holy Prophet's

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]  
 wife in Islam, and the status within the Hindu religion where you often hear the chant of “Jai mata ji ki” referring to mothers. The status of women is clear in every faith and it is important, as the noble Lord says, that it becomes pivotal to our discussions.

## Wagner Group: Sanctions Regime

### *Commons Urgent Question*

*The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given in the House of Commons on Wednesday 25 January.*

“The war in Ukraine, as we all agree, is a barbaric, illegal incursion into a sovereign nation by another. It has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, mass displacement and an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.

We will always stand up for our friends and allies, and we are proud to have led the world’s response, in partnership with our allies, in supporting Ukraine in its fight against Putin’s aggression. We will deliver tanks to roll back any Russian advance, we continue providing aid to help Ukrainians as they defend their homeland, and we have unveiled the most stringent sanctions on any country at any time in our history. We want to use economic sanctions to starve Putin’s war machine and put direct pressure on every individual involved in the decision to go to war and continue to make war on Ukraine.

In response to the Question that has been asked today, I should say that it is a long-standing custom that the Government do not comment publicly on individual cases. It would not be appropriate to break that custom, even in a case as serious as this one, in which there is obviously public interest. However, I want to outline the general approach taken to date by the Treasury’s Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation in cases in which persons designated under sanctions seek licences for legal fees, and how that has been followed, and the strong constitutional reasons for that.

Within the sanctions regime broadly, because everyone has a right to legal representation, it is possible for frozen assets to be used to pay for that legal representation. OFSI grants licences to allow sanctioned people to cover their own legal fees, provided that the costs are reasonable. To be absolutely clear, decisions on the issuance of licences for legal fees are largely taken by OFSI officials in line with standard practice. The principles and guidance for assessing these applications are long-standing and have been published for a number of years. Applications are assessed solely on a costs basis.

As the UK is a country with checks and balances, it is right that the relevant court, rather than the Government, should decide the outcome of a case on the substantive merits. However, I can confirm that in the light of recent cases, and related to this Question, the Treasury is now considering whether this approach is the right one and whether changes can be made without the Treasury assuming unacceptable legal risk, while ensuring that we adhere to the rule of law. In advance of that, I know that the entire House shares the same goal: to support Ukraine and see all those

behind the invasion punished for their complicity. The Government will continue to take a hard line on all those responsible.”

11.55 am

**Lord Tunncliffe (Lab):** My Lords, I will not refer to the particular case in the Question because it is clear that I would get the unhelpful answers tendered in the other place. However, we have two evils and a question of process. First, while it may be right for sanctioned individuals to use frozen funds to defend themselves, it cannot be right to use such funds to attack the free speech of others. Secondly, it cannot be right that if you have enough money you can, through the courts, suppress the free speech of others. What are the Government doing urgently to address these issues? Finally, in the other place the Minister said that decisions on legal fees are “largely taken by ... officials”. Largely but not wholly means that there must have been others. Who are they?

**The Parliamentary Secretary, HM Treasury (Baroness Penn) (Con):** My Lords, to try to take the noble Lord’s questions on directly, the Government condemn the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation, commonly known as SLAPPs. The Prigozhin case can be characterised as a SLAPP, which is an abuse of the UK legal system. We are committed to introducing targeted anti-SLAPP legislation to stop Russian oligarchs corrupting our legal system. The reforms will include a statutory definition of SLAPPs, an early dismissal mechanism and costs protection for SLAPPs cases.

When it comes to the sanctions and licensing regimes, where there are derogations set out in the sanctions regime and the conditions of those derogations have been met, licences may be authorised. There is a specific derogation for legal expenses which is judged on the cost of those expenses, not the merits of any legal case. None the less, I agree with the point that the noble Lord has made: we need to take action in these cases, and the Government are committed to doing so.

On other licences for legal fees, this is a derogation that applies across the sanctions regime so there will be multiple licences issued. There is a general licence available for legal fees and that decision is, on the whole, taken by officials rather than Ministers.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, I have seen Wagner operatives with my own eyes in Sudan. I was the first in Parliament to call for that group’s proscription. I did so to Ministers in this Chamber on 25 April; I did so again on 23 May, 9 June, 7 July, 15 November and, most recently, 21 December. It is an outrage that a licence from the Treasury has allowed this group to launder money through the English legal system on palpably malicious legal activities. As the Minister has just said, it is an abuse of the system. Why are the Government procrastinating on national security grounds? This group is a threat to our security and our safety, to British nationals abroad and to our allies. Why is this group not being proscribed?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, it is worth clarifying a number of points. In this case, we are talking about a designated person and the derogations under the sanctions

regime allow for legal fees. That is clearly provided for within the sanctions regime. I understand that the Wagner Group is subject to sanctions under the Russia sanctions. On the question of proscription, I will have to write to the noble Lord.

**Lord Stirrup (CB):** My Lords, Russia's war in Ukraine is being spearheaded by a mercenary organisation which has terror, torture, murder, rape and all other forms of brutality at the heart of its activities. Does the Minister agree that, quite aside from the illegality of Russia's actions in Ukraine, we should be doing all we can to ensure that such a group is unable to operate anywhere in what we would refer to as our civilised world and that we have made a less than glorious start in this regard?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I join the noble and gallant Lord in completely condemning the actions of this group. I know we have had the basis to sanction the group under the Russian sanction regime. I am sure we are looking at all the tools we have available to us to take further action. Proscription was one avenue raised by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, and I will write to noble Lords to set out the Government's position on that.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, having heard these powerful pleas from our two colleagues, proscription is the only answer. The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, pointed out that he raised this subject for the first time months ago. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, has given a graphic brief description of the evil that is being perpetrated. We should not be dilly-dallying. We should get on with it and proscribe the wretched organisation.

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I am not sure I can add to that at this time. What I would say to my noble friend is that when it comes to the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the steps that this Government have taken are unprecedented in terms of sanctioning individuals and entities. Nothing is off the table when it comes to further action we are looking to take. For example, we introduced the oil price cap at the end of last year as a new way to try to squeeze the revenues Russia can get from oil to fund this illegal war.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, when the Minister responds to the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, and my noble and gallant friend Lord Stirrup about proscription, which was also touched on by the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, will she particularly take into account the views of the former Africa Minister Vicky Ford? In another place, she has called for this organisation to be designated as a terrorist organisation. Given her experience—she is now chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sudan and South Sudan—will the Minister particularly look at what Vicky Ford has said about the use of diamonds and gold from mines in Sudan and neighbouring countries such as CAR which are used to circumvent the currency problems? This enables the breaking of sanctions by the kleptocrats, oligarchs and militias which commit such appalling, outrageous crimes in places such as Ukraine.

**Baroness Penn (Con):** The Government of course listen carefully to the views of all parliamentarians on this matter. Any decisions on these cases are taken within the legal framework that they need to be taken within.

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** My Lords, I am sure that my noble friend will appreciate the strength of feeling she has heard from the interventions so far. I think we are coming across our old friend non-joined-up government. It seems incredible that the departments concerned were not able to co-ordinate against a clearly identified enemy—the Wagner Group. Would the Minister accept that we are, in a sense, on a sort of war footing? It is a modern kind of war, a different kind of war, but in the past this would never have been allowed. Can she take back that message and make sure we do not do anything further to succour our enemies?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I absolutely agree with my noble friend on the need for co-ordination across government. Obviously different regimes, such as the sanction regime and the proscription regime, have different legal frameworks. I am sure that across government we are working to look at all the tools we have available to ensure that groups supporting the atrocities we see in Ukraine are stopped and that we use the powers we have to intervene on their actions.

**Lord Rooker (Lab):** What was the specific rank of the civil servants who took this decision?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I do not have that information and I would not comment on that. It is important to understand that this decision was clearly taken within the legal framework for sanctions that we have, which has been approved by this Parliament.

**Earl Attlee (Con):** My Lords, will my noble friend take the views of this House directly to her right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** I can undertake to do that and to include the strength of feeling around the question of other tools that we have at our disposal. As my noble friend noted, this would also need to be drawn to the attention of other government Ministers.

**Lord Scriven (LD):** My Lords, my noble friend Lord Purvis said that he raised this organisation months ago. Once it was raised, did any government department do an assessment on this organisation? What was the outcome of that particular assessment, which stopped the organisation to date being banned?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** As I said, the Government have taken action against the organisation. For example, it is subject to sanctions under the Russian sanctions regime. I have said I will need to write to noble Lords on wider matters. I undertake to do that.

**Lord Bellingham (Con):** My Lords, the Minister will be aware that some of the West's sanctions are being undermined by a key NATO ally, Turkey, where a number of oligarch's yachts have been diverted to and



[LORD BELLINGHAM]

a number of trust funds set up for their assets. Are the Government going to tackle this problem with our NATO counterparts?

**Baroness Penn (Con):** One of the key aims of the Government's sanctions policy is to co-ordinate with our allies to ensure that sanctions are as effective as possible and are not circumvented. We will continue to take action to do so.

## Armed Forces: Resilience

### *Motion to Take Note*

12.06 pm

*Moved by Lord Robathan*

That this House takes note of the level of resilience of the Armed Forces, given the reduction in personnel and equipment as set out in the *Defence in a Competitive Age* command paper (CP 411), published on 22 March 2021.

**Lord Robathan (Con):** My Lords, I am delighted to have secured this debate. I think it is a fairly timely debate. We look forward to hearing the maiden speeches of my noble friend Lord Hintze and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, with whom I worked in the Ministry of Defence—now I regret saying it—nearly a decade ago. They will know that it is the convention of maiden speeches to be not controversial. I hope they can both break that mould.

I will not labour my own points for too long because I retired from the Army as a major and we have down to speak four former Chiefs of the Defence Staff, one former Defence Secretary and NATO Secretary-General and one former First Sea Lord, and there is another Chief of the Defence Staff listening to mark my homework. I am not very happy about any of that, but they all have much more knowledge than I do.

Politicians need to understand defence and they do not. Spending money on defence is just like any other insurance policy. You have to pay the premiums on, for instance, a house. While people resent the premiums as a waste of money, when the house burns down, they turn to the insurance policy and find that they have not spent enough on their premiums. It is much more serious for our country if we are unable to defend ourselves because we did not pay sufficient premiums for defence.

What is the first duty of government? It is, and it always has been, the defence of the realm. Treasury Ministers especially see money spent on defence as wasted and continually try to cut it. Defence reviews are intended to reduce costs. I was involved in the 2010 review. It was very traumatic. I spoke to a fellow Minister and said I was thinking of resigning. He said, "Andrew, don't be such a fool; they'll just put somebody more compliant in instead of you." It was weak—I know.

The 2010 review was driven purely by saving money. The Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time had no feeling for defence nor understanding of it at all. In

the review, we talked a lot about asymmetric warfare. I do not remember any mention of an invasion of Ukraine with tanks. I do not recall Russia being mentioned particularly at all. We did not understand the threat then, as we do now, despite the invasion of Georgia in 2008. We naively thought of China as an ally for greater prosperity for a "golden decade". We failed to recognise that the belt and road initiative is basically a tool of economic hegemony and imperialism.

At the same time, the review added the nuclear deterrent to the defence budget from the central government budget, which was of course a huge burden. It also added pension liabilities, which had not been there before—I am sure that someone will correct me if my memory is defective. During the coronavirus panic, we spent £410 billion or so on measures to combat the virus. I think that most people now acknowledge that that was not necessarily all money well spent. In that time, per year, defence got about 1/10th of that. There is now a cash increase, but inflation is wiping it out—and what is the first duty of government?

This debate is not intended as an exercise in nostalgia, but, during the Cold War, we typically had something like 55,000 soldiers in West Germany—cavalry, infantry, engineers, signallers and artillery—who were all facing the threat from the East. We had several hundred tanks—I think it was about 900, but I may be wrong—innumerable armed vehicles and a real capability to fight a war. We had, I think, 12 squadrons of fighter aircraft, helicopters, et cetera, as well as 20,000-plus airmen and tactical nukes for most of the time.

Young people—those under 50; I am old—do not really understand the Cold War and look baffled if you mention it. But it was a real war of deterrence, and it worked. There were four armoured divisions in Germany for most of the time, until 4 Div moved to York in the 1980s, as an infantry division. But, even then, we could field three armoured divisions—although they were always being cut by the Treasury, which is why, in the first Gulf War, 1 Div had to borrow units and personnel from across other formations. But, actually, it did pretty well in the first Gulf War: we had over 53,000 UK service personnel in total deployed there, including me.

Now there is war in Europe, which puts the security of all of us at risk. We could not possibly put a single division in the field. There was a good article in Monday's *Times* titled:

"'Hollowed-out' UK military can't send a division to war".

I should say that the reporting was not prompted by this debate. But, 77 years ago, Winston Churchill—it is always a bad thing to quote him—made a famous speech at Fulton, Missouri, which noble Lords will remember. It is remembered because of the Iron Curtain reference—but read on. He said that the Russians desired

"the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines ... From what I have seen of our Russian friends and Allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness."



We have shown military weakness in NATO— notwithstanding the announcement about Leopard tanks yesterday—in the West as a whole and in the UK.

We scrapped most of our tanks. As it happens, I had a discussion in 1991 with the then Defence Secretary, in which I said that I thought the tank would be viewed as the horse of the late 20th century. Actually, I stand by that: they are very vulnerable to drones, laser-guided mortar rounds, et cetera. But they still have utility in war—if noble Lords do not believe me, ask the Russians and the Ukrainians. We have scrapped or amalgamated most of our cavalry regiments: the so-called vulgar fractions—13th/18th, 14th/20th, 15th/19th, et cetera. There is only one regiment—the Royal Tank Regiment—and there used to be four when I served 32 years ago.

This is not nostalgia for the past; these are the facts. I will let others comment on how few fast jets we have to support out troops. But, again, we are told, “Oh, we don’t need jets or aircraft”—but, again, ask the combatants in Ukraine. We are told that drones, cyber and modern technology will mean that we need fewer troops, but this is not a binary issue: we need both if we are to defend ourselves. We need new technology and troops to use it and, above all, to hold ground. Again, ask the soldiers in Ukraine, in ghastly, cold, water-filled trenches.

I pay tribute to my right honourable friend the Member for Uxbridge for his lead, when he was Prime Minister, in sending armaments to Ukraine. I hope that my noble friend on the Front Bench will convey my message to the MoD and No. 10 that, first, we need to continue our support. But we also need to replenish our war-fighting stocks. How many MLRS have we sent, and how many do we have left? I am not sure about NLAWs; I read that we are spending some money on them, but we need to replenish our stocks. We know that sending one squadron of Challenger tanks is reducing our limited armoured capability. We must now spend extra money to fill up our armouries, as a first step—remember the insurance premiums.

I will touch briefly on the failings of procurement, which is a subject for further debates and which, frankly, is a scandal. They are caused in part by the swift turnover of military personnel, by incoming defence chiefs always wanting new and expensive additions to equipment to catch up, and by defence contractors, who can run rings round civil servants, who know little about industry. My noble friend Lord Hammond of Runnymede got a grip of this pretty well when he was Defence Secretary, when I was his Minister for the Armed Forces, but, sadly, it appears to be out of control again: witness the Ajax debacle. There is huge waste, which is to the detriment of our defence budget and operational efficiency.

I turn briefly to personnel. Resilience requires a steady flow of personnel to be recruited and retained. We will not even nearly hit our recruitment targets for this year, and the numbers leaving are increasing—I spoke to someone who should know quite a lot about this only the day before yesterday. Part of the issue is pay, but I suggest that it is more about a sense of purpose or mission. We desperately do not want conflict, but operations do encourage recruitment. We need

reserves for resilience, but the numbers are in decline. From the figures, the Reserve Forces apparently decreased by 3%, and the number of new people joining has gone down by over one-third.

Personnel need to feel valued; it is the same as any other job. Over the years, the Treasury bean-counters have looked at reducing quality of life across the board. The messes of soldiers, sergeants and officers have been subjected to endless cost-cutting, so the mess is less likely to be viewed as an alternative to home, which is what it used to be 40 years ago. For instance, the catering is outsourced; I have eaten some of it, and the quality is much reduced in general. I will not mention married quarters, which are again in trouble, or the determination to sell off the attractive houses for commanders because civil servants say, “Why should a general live in a big house?”—perhaps because they do not. It is about the perks being whittled away. One has to make an attractive offer to keep good people, who can earn more in the civilian world.

I chanced on this section of a former Defence Secretary’s autobiography:

“Britain can count itself fortunate in having such clever and capable people at the top of its armed forces. I often wondered why they seemed so much better than their counterparts in other similar countries. I came to the conclusion that it was the result of family history. Many of Britain’s senior officers have followed in their fathers’ footsteps”.

This is from *See How They Run* by Geoff Hoon, who was Defence Secretary for six years. There is some truth in it, but there are other reasons as well—it is particularly because people do not feel valued. So many Ministers over the years—I do not blame Geoff Hoon for this—have said, “What a good system we’ve got. We have such good Armed Forces and commanders. How can we change it and make it less good?”

Our Armed Forces are hugely admired at home and abroad, although I do not think that they are necessarily the envy of the world. But Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s funeral in September, which was seen by many millions around the world, showed discipline, attention to detail, pride and tradition, which astonished many, I suspect. But it is not by chance: the service personnel involved also fight wars, so let us not destroy our admirable Armed Forces by penny-pinching in so many ways. Tradition, pride and effective fighting and defence go hand in hand.

Finally, as an historian, I say that we should learn the lessons of history. In the 1930s, disarmament after the First World War was very popular: we could not possibly fight another major war. It is the same today: we are cutting our troops, ships and aircraft as I speak. A House of Commons Library paper published last April said:

“the Ministry of Defence’s day-to-day budget is ... set to decline in real terms”—

that was before inflation reached what it has. There has been no change since that was written, so I say to my noble friend the Minister, the Ministers in the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister: let the Government change tack. Speak softly, but carry a big stick. I beg to move.

12.19 pm

**Lord Hintze (Con) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, I am most grateful to my noble friend Lord Strathclyde and the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of The Shaws, for generously acting as my supporters. I thank all Members on both sides of the House for their welcome and courtesy towards me. Kafka said:

“Before the Law a doorkeeper stands on guard.”

He was certainly right in that respect. This House would not function without the doorkeepers and ushers, and I am deeply grateful for their guidance and good humour.

The clergyman and essayist Sydney Smith wrote:

“I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so.”

Similar sentiments can be levelled at those who comment on your Lordships’ House without knowing very much about what it actually does. I fear that that may even relate to those who should know better.

Scrutiny is a key function of this House, but it also exemplifies something critical to the freedoms we enjoy today: namely, the difference between being governed and being ruled. Goethe was right to say:

“To rule is easy, to govern difficult.”

To be governed is to have a voice. In the case of your Lordships’ House, it is also to act as a constraint on what the late, learned Lord Hailsham termed the “elective dictatorship” of the other place, but without competing against it.

That your Lordships’ House is ever vigilant over the precious mandate entrusted to it is critical. I am all the more aware of that inheritance for not having been born on these shores. I was born in China, after my family were forced out of Russia following the revolution. A change of regime there sent us on the move once again, making my family and me refugees. We found a new home in Australia, when I was only a few months old. It is a country I continue to hold dear, and it is worth noting that today is Australia Day, 26 January. I came to the United Kingdom in 1984; it is a country that has allowed me to thrive and that has always been seen as the paradigm of parliamentary democracy, good governance and fairness. I feel deeply honoured to have been able to serve on a number of its great institutions, and to continue to do so.

I have always had an interest in politics and, to be clear, given my family’s history—which, if anyone wants, we can discuss over a beer—I have always had an acute interest in geopolitics. The world is becoming more complex and dangerous. That is exacerbated furthermore by climate change, which not only is very real but presents its own security challenges. Though having qualified in science and engineering, my career for the last 40 years has been in global finance, and I am deeply aware that economics is intrinsic to the effectiveness and well-being of the country.

I declare an interest as an honorary captain in the Royal Naval Reserve and as a former captain in the Australian regular army, where I served in the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. For our civil society to function, it is critical for it to be served by professional Armed Forces. Their sense of

service and duty is exemplified by my friend—and I do mean friend—the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, with whom I share this maiden speech day.

The ability to legislate freely is something many take for granted. We should feel blessed, rather than burdened, that we have a solid constitution with checks and balances, built up by precedents and the lived experience of generations over centuries. That is not easy; it is protected by our exceptionally professional, ethical and effective Armed Forces, who are there by consent, commanding the respect of the nation, our allies and the world.

My noble friend Lord Robathan is correct to highlight the issue of resilience. Support for the Armed Forces at this time is an absolute priority, and, for our services to be effective, we must also ensure that service families are adequately cared for. I was delighted to note the announcement of a revised families strategy. I declare another interest as a patron of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

The ambitions set out in the Command Paper, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, underline the range of threats we face. It is well known that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, but that vigilance is not free. Given what we see in Europe currently, it is not contentious to say that the world is becoming increasingly challenging, complex and dangerous. The UK’s regular place at or near the top of annual soft power surveys is something to be proud of, but soft power without hard power is, frankly, no power at all. The integrated review aims to

“create armed forces that are both prepared for warfighting and more persistently engaged worldwide”.

It is right; it is time to invest more, not less. One thing is very sure: complacency is not an option.

I thank noble Lords for welcoming me. I sincerely hope that I will add constructively to your Lordships’ House, and I have every intention of doing so with the courtesy and graciousness I have seen in others here.

12.26 pm

**Lord Robertson of Port Ellen (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, in his maiden speech. I applaud and agree with his final sentiment that complacency is not an option. I know him well and recognise his remarkable and successful business career, his pride in his Australian background, especially so on this Australia Day, and his remarkable record for philanthropy, not only to the Armed Forces but to institutions such as the Natural History Museum. He has a lot of experience and wisdom, and we therefore look forward to hearing more from him in future.

I will speak about Ukraine, about which we really should have a full debate in this Parliament, both in this House and in the other House. It is increasingly clear that Vladimir Putin has declared war on the West. It is also clear that we are not responding adequately to that overt challenge to our countries and what we stand for. There is no visible urgency in our national behaviour. It is, of course, a war unlike the wars of the past. However, that old-fashioned type of brutal war is being waged against the territory and the people of the sovereign state of Ukraine. In contrast,

Putin's war on the West is much more subtle, more hybrid, less visible and more multifaceted, but just as potent and damaging. By using misinformation, election interference, cyberattacks, corruption, organised crime and malicious diplomacy, and by exploiting every crack in our democratic societies, he is seeking to disrupt and to weaken the fabric of our liberal, open democracies.

At the same time, that has nothing to do with promoting an alternative economic or social model, as the Soviet Union sought to do with its brand of Marxism-Leninism. Putin may well harbour, in secret, demented dreams about recreating that oppressive empire, but, in reality, he is violently posturing to gain attention and hoping to establish some parity with the United States of America. With his economy tanking and his young, economically active population draining away, those are simply foolish delusions.

The issue for us today as we approach the 365th day of Putin's three-day war against Ukraine is: what should we be doing in response to the declaration of war by the Russian President? Here is my checklist of what we need to do. First, we need to secure our own societies and democratic systems. With London still a reservoir of Russian dark money, as we heard earlier, and London's lawyers still doing the dirty work for Russian money men and women, more needs to be done to enforce and toughen sanctions against those who do the Kremlin's bidding or who profit from his regime.

Secondly, our defences need strengthening, as has already been said and will be said again in this debate—and I am sure in the other maiden speech, from the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, who I know and respect very well as a friend. That does not just mean spending more on defence; it means replenishing the stocks we are giving to the Ukrainians. Thirdly, we need to give the Ukrainians more. If, as Ministers continually say, the Ukrainians are fighting for themselves, their country, and for us, as indeed they are, by holding stocks and equipment here, when our front line is actually in eastern Ukraine, we leave ourselves dangerously exposed.

The fourth thing we need to do is to tell the Russian people that we, NATO, the European Union and the West are not attacking Russia. Instead, we are helping the sovereign state of Ukraine to defend itself against an unprovoked attack. How do we get that message across? The answer is that we did it in the Cold War and can do it again. More Russian language information needs to get into Russia, and we need to promote the independent BBC World Service, as well as YouTube, Instagram and a host of means that can get past the wall of deceit and lies which characterise Russia's propaganda outlets. A younger generation can access the web, but the older folk—that is, the majority—in Russia depend on the official media, with its Orwellian approach to truth and facts.

Fifthly, we need to tell the Russian military, whose advice Putin clearly ignored when he ordered the invasion, some bold truths. The Russian high command knows that it was ill-prepared for such an ambitious war, and that it had, through faulty and over-optimistic intelligence, completely underestimated the opposition,

resilience and ingenuity of the Ukrainians. The Russian military know that they are struggling against a formidable, highly motivated Ukrainian population, now being armed with western-supplied, sophisticated weaponry that they have no answer to. In their collective memory must be the parallel with the Red Army in Afghanistan in February 1989. They were faced with an endless, unwinnable war costing lives and precious resources, so the Kremlin ordered the mighty Red Army of the Soviet Union to come home. Nobody was asking at that time for an off-ramp or a ceasefire, or some face saver for the Russians. They simply folded their tents and left—and 32 months later there was no Soviet Union.

Sixthly, we need to tell Putin and the small number of cronies around him advising him and telling him all the time what he wants to hear, that all his strategic objectives have failed. He wanted to stop NATO enlargement, he wanted to split Europe, and he wanted to split Europe from the United States of America—all failed. He wanted to crush and eliminate Ukraine from the map, and instead he has produced a new, deep, permanent feeling of nationhood in that country. He wanted to annex and absorb the Donbas and the land corridor to Crimea, but now his spokesman cannot even describe what has been annexed and what they still hold.

We need to tell Vladimir Putin this: one step over the Article 5 NATO line and there will be an existential risk to the Russian motherland. Here is another message for the man in the Kremlin, who gave us this terrible war. Speaking, as I do, as the only person ever to announce the invoking of Article 5—that guarantee that an attack on one NATO country should be seen as an attack on them all—I can tell Vladimir Putin this. I met him nine times during my time in NATO, and at that point we did good business together, but I tell him now that the Article 5 guarantee of a nuclear weapons alliance goes well beyond normal red lines.

Finally, we need to address the global south and the lack of understanding of Ukraine's position in Africa, South America and India. It seems that many countries in the south see this as a regional conflict of payback for NATO enlargement or a challenge to the over-mighty US and the arrogance of the West. However, they must understand that, if it becomes accepted that borders can be changed by force and that sovereign states can be invaded and annexed, if nuclear blackmail intimidates neighbouring states, many more countries than Ukraine will be on the danger list. We need urgently to get that message over and to make an effort to get it heard loudly.

I end with a sentiment worth the House pondering on if anybody is worried about further escalation. The greatest nuclear threat we face today is a Russian victory. We must do everything possible to prevent that happening.

12.36 pm

**Lord Stirrup (CB):** My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for securing this important debate at such a crucial time for the defence of our country. I, too, congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, on an excellent maiden speech, and I



[LORD STIRRUP]

greatly look forward to the contribution of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, who has much wisdom and experience to contribute on this subject and to the House's wider deliberations.

Resilience is a crucial issue for any military organisation, but for ours more than most—and for ours in particular. It is not our policy, on the whole, to start wars; we are usually on the receiving end of them, which means that we are generally at a disadvantage at the beginning of any conflict. An aggressor has the advantage of choosing the time, place and manner of military action, and will very often seek to take advantage of an opponent's weaknesses. There will be weaknesses, since no nation's military can be strong everywhere, at all times. That means that we need the capacity to absorb the first blow, to roll with it, recover our balance, adapt to the circumstances and demands of the particular conflict, and then to seize and exploit the initiative. Even the briefest study of military history will serve to illustrate the point.

What gives us the necessary resilience, and what are the particular capabilities and characteristics that enable us to overcome disadvantage and get on to the front foot? The most commonly heard answer to this question and one that we have certainly heard today is the size of our Armed Forces—the numbers of ships, troops and aircraft. Indeed, size does matter. Losses are often highest in the early stages of a conflict. Start with too little, and there may be insufficient capability left on which to base a recovery. The noble Lord, Lord West, may have a view on that from his own experience.

One argument sometimes put forward in defence of reduced numbers is that we do not intend to fight in high-intensity conflict on our own, and that it is our membership of alliances such as NATO that creates the necessary scale. To an extent that is true, but only to an extent. The argument itself can pose dangers. If too many members of an alliance continue to reduce force levels on the basis that contributions of others will create the necessary mass, that mass will never be achieved. That has certainly been the situation in NATO for many years now.

We need larger Armed Forces. Numbers have been progressively reduced by successive Governments on the basis of cost saving, with no underpinning strategic rationale. In the early 1990s, for example, the Government insisted on defence cuts as a post-Cold War peace dividend, despite the fact that we had just been involved in a conflict that had stretched our resources to the utmost and had nothing to do with the Soviet Union. It is worth remembering that the only way that we were able to field a division in the first Gulf War was by cannibalising just about the whole of the British Army of the Rhine—and all three services are much smaller now.

Inadequate force levels are not just a problem in high-intensity conflict, though. The Government's appetite for the employment of the military instrument frequently exceeds their willingness to sustain appropriate capacity. At the moment, for example, Typhoon squadrons are spending long periods deployed on operational duty in response to the dangerous situation in Ukraine. Of course, it is absolutely right that they should do so, but

the relatively small size of the force means that people are frequently away from their families, they are unable to train effectively when they are at home base, and morale is suffering as a consequence. Poor morale leads to poor retention, which simply exacerbates the problem.

Numbers of troops and of platforms are by no means the whole story. Soldiers in battalions, sailors in ships and air crew in aircraft are of little use if they do not have the systems that allow them to succeed in modern combat or the weapons with which to fight. The Defence Secretary has confirmed what we have all known for a long time: that the Army cannot field a fighting division. But this shortcoming is not a consequence of too few soldiers; it is because they do not have the necessary communications, logistics support, armoured mobility, weapons systems or munitions. The same is true of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Both services can field some remarkable capabilities, but not in the number required or with the necessary sustainability. One of the earliest lessons of the war in Ukraine was the reminder—for those who needed it—of the appalling rate of consumption of weapons in such conflict.

I will not give comfort to potential adversaries by detailing the UK's specific weaknesses here. The noble Baroness the Minister knows full well what they are. I will simply note that, in evidence to your Lordships' International Relations and Defence Committee at the end of last year, the Defence Secretary confirmed that the UK had for far too long "hollowed out"—his words—our stocks of weapons and munitions. He has publicly repeated this statement in just the past few days. So, while we certainly need to expand the size of our Armed Forces, our immediate and urgent priority is to ensure that our current force structure can fight effectively and enduringly in high-intensity conflict. At the moment, it cannot.

This brings me to another dimension of the problem. Additional defence expenditure is of course required to bring weapons stocks not just to where they before we—rightly—donated a significant portion of them to Ukraine, but to where they should have been in the first place. We need suppliers, however, with whom we can contract for such purchases. The kinds of complex weapons that have been so successful in Ukraine cannot be produced overnight, and particularly not in the numbers that we and our allies need. That will require industrial capacity that does not exist at the moment.

We must expand our idea of resilience beyond the military community to encompass the industrial base that supports it. Such industrial capacity depends on private sector investment in the appropriate plant and personnel. But this will be forthcoming only if the investors see a reasonable prospect of a sustained return, which will in turn depend upon a fairly steady drumbeat of orders from our and other Governments. All too often, however, the procurement tap is turned on and off erratically in the face of short-term budgetary pressures. This is not the way to encourage long-term investment in industrial capacity. There is a need for a much more strategic approach to defence procurement if we are to sustain the industrial base necessary to national resilience.



Such an approach needs to address issues of culture as well as quantity. May I recommend the recently published report from your Lordships' International Relations and Defence Committee into the extent—or otherwise—that defence policy has moved from aspiration to reality? One of the report's more concerning findings is that high-technology companies consider the Ministry of Defence to be one of the world's worst customers. They say that its institutional resistance to innovative ideas, its low appetite for risk, its unwillingness to invest in experimentation and the subsequent commercialisation of novel approaches all conspire to deter high-tech companies from working with the MoD. But we have seen in Ukraine how an imaginative fusion of civilian and military approaches and technology can produce startling battlefield successes.

War and the threat of defeat can of course force co-operation between apparently strange bedfellows, but we cannot afford to wait until we are embroiled in an actual conflict before we face up to this challenge. We need a change of culture in our day-to-day processes, but the Ministry of Defence cannot do this alone. The Treasury, too, needs to adopt a much more entrepreneurial and co-operative approach to innovation, risk and long-term investment.

I have tried this afternoon to demonstrate that defence resilience is a complex issue and not just a question of numbers, important though they are. But underpinning all this is the inescapable question of money; 2% of GDP is simply inadequate to fund the aspirations set out in last year's independent review and defence Command Paper. Both of those documents are being reviewed, but the reviews are taking place in the face of an even more dangerous world, so the equation will only have become worse. It is well past time that the Government faced up to their responsibilities in this regard. Fine words butter no parsnips—particularly when we cannot afford the parsnips in the first place.

12.46 pm

**Lord West of Spithead (Lab):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for this very timely debate. I commend the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, on his splendid maiden speech; I am delighted that he changed from khaki in Australia to dark blue in the UK. I am delighted by his links with the Royal Navy and welcome him to the House.

A few days ago, the Defence Secretary repeated, as was said by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, that our armed services were “hollowed out” and had been for a number of years, and that it was getting worse. Well, what a surprise. This is something that a number of us in this place have been banging on about for a considerable time. We were constantly told that we were talking nonsense. I looked back through *Hansard*; I went back only five years but, time and again, I saw that it was a constant theme of mine and that the government and MoD response every time was that I did not really understand it and that everything was well. Clearly, it was not.

The Ukraine war has been a wake-up call reminding us all of the fact that, in peer-on-peer conflict—I use that term advisedly, I must say—weapon usage rates are extremely high. This is something that we knew but, for a number of years, not least due to financial

pressures and because our enemies have been terrorists and not national armies, successive Administrations have ignored what we had learned at such cost. What is quite clear is the inadequacy of both the weapons and munitions stocks across all three services. It is the same for weapon holdings as well. For several years, ships have left their home ports without full outfits of weapons. This is unacceptable because, once a ship deploys, it may well end up in a hot war. Historically, we were aware of that and never let it happen. For example, HMS “Exeter” was in the West Indies guard ship in early 1982; she was deployed south as soon as the war started in the south Atlantic. Although one would never use Sea Dart missiles in the guard ship role in the West Indies—stopping hurricanes and the like—she had the full outfit of Sea Darts and used them to very good effect protecting the carrier, fighting down south and shooting down Argentinian aircraft.

Addressing these problems should be one of the highest priorities for the Government, as was recognised by the International Relations and Defence Committee, which has been referred to already: its very good report recognised this. The other thing that has been highlighted is the importance of spares, support and maintenance back-up. As defence funding has been squeezed—and it has been, year on year, over the last few years—so crucial maintenance has been curtailed due to lack of stores items. This actually impacts on personnel: if you are a key maintenance rating on a ship, you are proud of your weapons system, you are ready to do the work, you will work overnight when the ship is in harbour, and then you are told, “We haven't got that bit of spare gear: I'm sorry, you will just not be able to do it.” That is really bad for morale and it impacts on people staying in the service or leaving. Of course, it leads to breakdown of very key machinery and weapons systems and you then end up deploying without them.

There is clearly a need to build greater resilience into the UK's own stocks, supply chains, as was mentioned by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, and industrial capacity. Industrial capacity needs to be looked at very closely. I will not go into that now but, my goodness me, it does. It is not just quantity of ammunition, missiles and spares that are significant; the number of people and platforms have a significance as well. We have not faced a peer enemy in a hot war, really, since the Second World War—only briefly in Korea and briefly in the south Atlantic. Like the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, I do not want to be nostalgic about it, but between the break-out from Normandy and the surrender of the Germans on Lüneburg Heath, when we had huge, overwhelming air power, the British Army in Europe lost 4,500 tanks in action against the Germans. This gives an idea of the scale of these things.

The loss rates of tanks in the Ukraine war and the clamour by Ukraine for more armour show that tank numbers are important. There had been a growing consensus that the tank was a thing of the past. Attack helicopters, drones and smart long-range missiles meant they were rather like the battleship and no longer relevant. It always struck me as strange, I have to say, when I sat in committees in the MoD: if the tank was no longer important, why the hell were we spending so much money on systems to destroy them?

[LORD WEST OF SPITHEAD]

But that is another issue. We have been too quick to discard tanks, and the fall in numbers is now a real problem, I believe, for the Army. Of course, we have given some away as well—quite rightly, but, my goodness me, I think we need to look at that carefully.

I have another figure from years ago. One hopes there is never fighting like this again, but 105 years ago, post the battle of Amiens where we defeated the German army, the British Army, probably the most powerful British Army we ever had, was advancing and beating the Germans day by day until the surrender on 11 November 1918. We suffered 412,000 casualties out of the 1.9 million men fighting. Once again, personnel losses in the Ukraine war have been highlighted: when you are fighting like this, you suffer large losses and the massive conscription efforts by the Russians, in particular, but also by the Ukrainians, show this. When I did my platoon commander's course in 1966, the average regiment had about 760 men in it. Now, the average regiment has about 400 men in it. I cannot believe that is just because they are doing things more efficiently. When it comes to rifle teams and such things, you need certain numbers. So numbers are actually important, and with war raging in Europe and the possibility of a world war, do we really believe that 70,000 is the right strength for our Army? I am not sure that is right.

Certainly, as an island nation—I would say this, would I not?—in the final analysis, the maritime is the most crucial environment for the security, survival and wealth of our nation. In World War II, the Royal Navy lost 132 destroyers ensuring that survival. We presently have six in our Navy. In the Falklands, 16 of our frigates and destroyers were lost or very badly damaged. We do not actually have that number operational today. Numbers are important.

As for logistics, it is interesting that, between the wars, we used to think about these sorts of things. We actually ensured that, with our 850-ship Navy, we had enough oil in stock in the UK to fight for six months at war rates. People were thinking about resilience. People do not seem to think about resilience now: everything is just enough, just in time. Yet our NATO allies look to the UK to provide maritime capability. The chairman of the US joint combined chiefs said that sea power was something that

“the United States, for a variety of reasons, expects our British allies to contribute to.”

Our contribution, I have to say, is smaller than is needed.

I find it extraordinary that, as almost every other country has raised defence spending, some by huge amounts, as the war in Ukraine has progressed, the UK has not. How much risk are we willing to take? It is all very well providing Ukraine with equipment, and it is absolutely right that we should, and if necessary, provide even more, but I think we should make sure that our forces are ready and fully equipped for a possible war. By doing that—people watch this—we are much more likely to prevent a world war. People such as Putin look at our Armed Forces. He has looked, over the past few years, at how we and Europe seem to have had no interest in our defence forces, and

he has taken that as a green light to go and do things. I end by saying that I believe the Government are sleepwalking into disaster unless they rapidly grip this issue and increase defence spending.

12.55 pm

**Lord Peach (CB) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, I want to speak for the first time in this House on such an important topic, introduced by the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, in a debate with so many noble and noble and gallant speakers. I am grateful to the courtesy shown me since my arrival. I express my gratitude to Black Rod and her team, the clerks, the officers, the police and security staff of the House, especially the doorkeepers who helped me and my family on the occasion of my introduction. On that day, I was very fortunate to have as my supporters my noble friend Lord McDonald of Salford and the noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Holbeach.

I served for almost 50 years in His Majesty's Armed Forces, in the Royal Air Force, flying as a joint officer. I held command in every rank, deployed in many operations in many countries and have served extensively overseas, including as chair of NATO's Military Committee. Therefore, I strongly agree with the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and I wish to emphasise the centrality of our alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which grew from the wisdom—including much British wisdom—of those who saw the ugly reality of the Soviet Union's expansion in eastern Europe.

Once again, over 70 years later, we are seeing the consequence of President Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, with Russia revealed to all of us as an aggressive, full-scale military dictatorship. The war continues, with no immediate prospect for peace. As we have already heard eloquently described, there are many lessons for us in the UK and for all our allies. Some, if not all, are not new. One I would highlight is the critical importance of unity among allies. As the war approaches its grim first anniversary, sustaining unity in support of Ukraine will require sustained effort.

As we debate our resilience, we should bear in mind that President Putin continues to challenge any narrow definition of national security by weaponising energy supply and energy infrastructure, especially pipelines and the cables and other under-sea capacity upon which we depend and which must be protected—even food security and concepts the UK fought to establish, such as international waters and international airspace. Sustaining freedom of navigation is now at risk and is vital to the prosperity of the UK. Therefore, we need to widen our definition of national security and integrate our efforts to secure our national resilience, as was eloquently described by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup. In this, defence, our outstanding intelligence agencies and others need to play a part.

Many of our Scandinavian friends and allies practise total defence, which is a blend of defence, regular and reserve, national reserve, border security, protection of infrastructure, cyber defence and integration of what some noble Lords may recall as civil defence. If our infrastructure needs to be protected, we should organise our national security to do so. As the geographical consequences of the climate emergency to our own

north threaten the high north and the Arctic, where geopolitical disturbance threatens us directly, one way we should respond is to develop the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, which the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Richards of Herstmonceux, created 10 years ago and many of us have evolved ever since.

This force embraces our close allies in Scandinavia, the Baltic states, the Netherlands and Iceland. I would argue that this idea's time has come. With shared values and culture, the Joint Expeditionary Force is NATO-facing, flexible and has the potential to do more. We could digitise it with a UK-created secure, future-proof command and control network—an important lesson from Ukraine. We could continue to integrate and share intelligence and co-operate on future capabilities. In short, we have created something special; we should exploit it.

As noble Lords have heard, other lessons from Ukraine are also not new: the importance of intelligence-led operations; manoeuvre and armour; air-land integration with artillery at the rates of exchange that we have heard; and agile, empowered command and control at the tactical level. Above all, I emphasise the importance of logistics. My first predecessor as chair of the Military Committee was General of the Army, Omar Bradley, who said famously,

“Amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics.”

Any discussion on UK defence resilience has to include stock replenishment and sustainment.

As we have heard today, there is a place for innovation and new technology which, through research and development, is being brought rapidly to the battlefield by, with and through NATO, and there is a new centre to do that in London. However, as we have also heard, technology is not a substitute for the Armed Forces. As we focus on logistics, we need to understand technology's additive to the qualities we need of mass, motivated people, equipment, and a sense of mission and purpose.

The war in Ukraine is not the only challenge we face. The rise and global ambition of China, including as a military power, continues to be an issue. There is instability in Africa and there are unresolved issues in the Middle East. Closer to home—and here I declare my interest as the Prime Minister's special envoy to the western Balkans—we need to remain vigilant to President Putin's wider ambition to sow division, create instability and undermine NATO. The Russians remain very active in the Caucasus and the Balkans. We and our allies need to be active in response and remain strong to prevent the political crises in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and especially between Serbia and Kosovo, becoming security issues. As I have been taught on many visits to that troubled region, the price of freedom is not free.

The problems we face have been highlighted by many eloquent speeches, and many of the solutions have been tried before. I would argue that the time we are in makes implementation of those solutions urgent in the interest of our national security. The British Armed Forces continue to attract regular and reserve wonderful people, and they need our support. To paraphrase another famous speech from Winston Churchill, we need to brace ourselves to our duty. I am

personally grateful for the patience and courtesy that has been demonstrated to me, and I hope to contribute to the important work of this House.

1.03 pm

**Lord Craig of Radley (CB):** My Lords, it is my privilege and great pleasure, on behalf of the whole House, to express our warmest thanks to the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, who has shown in that speech, through his great experience elsewhere, a depth of knowledge which we will find helpful, interesting and inspiring in the future. As he mentioned, he has great experience on which to draw, as Chief of the Defence Staff, as chairman of the NATO Military Committee and, more recently, as the Prime Minister's special envoy to the western Balkans, where he has made significant improvements in understanding and in relationships at the highest level there. To all of that great experience he adds a charm and a friendly manner. I am quite certain that his contributions to this House will be valued extremely and welcomed very much in the future.

During the fourth Oral Question on Wednesday last week, the noble lord, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, asked the Minister for

“credible evidence that the Government are even now replenishing our own stocks of military equipment”.

In response, the Minister said that the MOD

“very closely engaged with industry”,

and with partners,

“to ensure that, holistically, industry is able to understand demand and plan accordingly to supply it.”—[*Official Report*, 18/1/23; col. 1823.]

I should like to pose again the question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Campbell. Holistically or not, the Minister's response was deeply disturbing; nothing seems to have been ordered, let alone delivered. Perhaps the Minister also shares my concerns.

Is some interdepartmental bureaucratic wrangle about costings causing inevitable and unjustifiable delay? Let me hazard a wild guess. The equipment donated to Ukraine had been pre-owned, so its valuation might not be that of new supplies—even ammunition has a shelf life. As some of the new stock will be to replenish UK holdings, if bought with additional stock for gifting to Ukraine, the unit price might be reduced. What assumptions should be factored in on that score? How much should be ledgered to the defence budget and how much to the consolidated fund, which is there to support operations beyond the normal peacetime activities of the UK Armed Forces? But while our forces are not involved in direct operations, some of their kit and ammunition certainly is involved.

There will of course be uncertainty about for how long and how much more we should give fighting equipment to the Ukrainians. Industry will need to know quantities to cost their new or renewed production. What is already only too clear is that much of that given to Ukraine is not surplus to the MOD's requirements, awaiting destruction or the auctioneers. What might be termed the UK Armed Forces' war stocks have been justifiably used in some quantity—after all, is that not what war stocks are there for? But in almost 12 months since the initial gifting of arms to Ukraine, no replenishing orders and contract stages



[LORD CRAIG OF RADLEY]

have been reached; this is extremely worrying. Maybe the Minister will be able to reassure the House that these concerns are much misplaced. As other noble lords have already pointed out, a key component of resilience is the ability to fight on effectively even after initial losses may have been inflicted. Gifting from war stocks is another form of loss.

One of the most telling lessons of the present conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not the repeat of World War I trench warfare but the reach and accuracy of missiles and other kinetic attack delivered over considerable distance from the air. For example, take the Ukrainian's sinking of the Moskva, a missile cruiser; or the severe damage and destruction of key bridges and arms dumps; or Russia's successes against Ukrainian infrastructure, even hundreds of kilometres from the actual front lines. Such successes underline more than ever why our own Armed Forces must have the ability to absorb losses well behind, as well as along, the front line, without losing the ability to fight on. When it comes to the viability of the UK's deterrent, a paucity of conventional fighting capability in war would be catastrophic. It could mean that all too soon the Prime Minister faced an Armageddon decision to use our deterrent or to surrender.

If a major fighting ship or two are lost with all hands, or aircraft or aircrew are caught by air attack on parked aircraft or on the mess, or key artillery pieces are destroyed, our limited fighting strength is further reduced. To fight on, replacements need to be immediately to hand. That is resilience—a resilience all too clearly lacking, I am afraid, in today's ORBAT. Surely it is time to gear up replenishment as though we were ourselves at war. The urgency required seems non-existent. If, as the Secretary of State admits, our stocks are hollowed out, let us see and hear of procurement action this day. Maybe we need a Kate Bingham-style approach to defence procurement in the future.

1.10 pm

**Earl Attlee (Con):** My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Robathan for introducing this debate. I agree with everything that noble Lords have said so far. Before saying anything substantive, I must refer to the two maiden speakers; I know I am not really supposed to. The experience of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, in NATO will be invaluable in complementing the experience of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson. I am pleased that he mentioned the importance of logistics, because I will be saying a word about that in a moment. Turning to my noble friend Lord Hintze and his excellent maiden speech, what I find admirable about him is that he initially trained as an engineer and had a short but useful time in the Australian army, in the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, or—I am late—RAEME.

My noble friend Lord Robathan mentioned numbers in one UK armoured division on Op Granby. On Op Telic in Iraq, when the division crossed the start line, it had 25,000 men and women on the nominal roll—I repeat, 25,000. My noble friend mentioned the importance of armoured formations and, by implication, armoured battle groups. As the Russians are finding out, and as

was reported in the *Times* recently, to attack dug-in infantry with anything but an armoured battle group is suicidal.

Touching directly on the war in Ukraine, I entirely agree with noble Lords, but I think it is too early to draw conclusions about what our defence posture should be in the future. We may be learning lessons—we will learn lessons—but we need to see what the outcome is. I also agree that we urgently need a full-scale and non-time-limited debate on the war in Ukraine, which really is an existential threat. We probably need to have regular debates on that.

Like many noble Lords, I think the Government are doing an extraordinarily good job in dealing with the war in Ukraine. Unfortunately, when I took a step back from Westminster during my recent illness, it seemed to be the only thing they were doing well. However, I praise my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for his sterling efforts and his frankness when discussing some of the problems in defence.

I am sure all noble Lords want to support the UK Government by speaking at various events about the war—but with authority. Speaking for myself, I cannot do this if I can rely only on a combination of the *Times* and the *Economist*, no matter how good they both are. Last year, I asked:

“Is the Minister aware of one difficulty: the paucity of briefing that we are receiving?”—[*Official Report*, 27/4/22; col. 354.]

In answer, my noble friend the Minister made the expected noises, including citing Parliamentary recesses, but I think I have had only one invitation to a briefing since that date.

The House will recognise that there will be a range of erroneous reasons why the Putin regime thought the time was right to invade Ukraine. Among these are—to some extent—Brexit, the accompanying instability and a weak UK Government caused by a hopelessly divided Conservative Party. The United States has its own problems. So far as the UK is concerned, there is also the false impression that we are no longer interested in defence and deterrence, despite the protestations of Ministers. When our opponents do their analysis of our Armed Forces, that must be the inescapable conclusion. We look happy to be able to deal with bush fires in the Sahel with “persistent engagement”, but not willing or able to deploy a fully bombed-up armoured division—or even exercise a small one.

We might be able to provide a mechanised division but, since we lack the necessary resilience, this will take nearly 12 months. However, what the Americans want from us is a fully supported armoured division at a useful state of readiness—a point made in the recent Select Committee report. When our opponents analyse our capabilities and resilience, they could be forgiven for thinking that we have only a heavily armoured gendarmerie with no depth, no redundancy and no reserves, especially in terms of logistics.

To provide your Lordships with just one illustration of hollowing out, I will have to go into the realm of military logistics; I apologise if this is too much detail. It is obvious that military logisticians will seek to have as few different types and models of logistics vehicles as possible. One reason is to reduce the spares inventory



and the special tools and test equipment that is necessary to support these vehicles in theatre. This applies in particular to engines and main assemblies.

In the years towards the late 1990s, the British Army was supplied with numerous batches of Land Rovers. However, in terms of engines and main assemblies, they were not interchangeable, although outwardly similar. This caused huge logistics problems in supporting the Land Rovers in the field, especially in the Balkans. The last Labour Government carefully procured a range of trucks called the Support Vehicle, or SV, manufactured by the MAN company in Germany. At the time, the maximum number needed would have been carefully calculated, allowing for attrition and, most importantly, unexpected demands. In other words, that Government were prepared to pay the insurance premium referred to by my noble friend Lord Robathan. It would have been a disaster to have to buy a subsequent batch of these trucks, because they could never be built to the same build specification and the Land Rover problem that I referred to would then be repeated.

I mentioned unexpected demand. During the UNPROFOR days and Op Grapple in the Balkans, we were lucky enough to have a Malaysian battalion come and help on a UN deployment. Supporting their own trucks so far from their home base would have presented the Malaysians with insurmountable logistical difficulties, so we loaned them several of our own Leyland DAF four-tonners. We had plenty available, and we had the spare parts in theatre. We were able to provide second-line equipment support or, if necessary, give the Malays a replacement vehicle. Most importantly, we had the resilience—we had the fat.

Up until recent years, the MoD would not sell or dispose of logistics vehicles unless either the fleet concerned was obsolete or there was no longer any obvious use for the vehicle—the latter being hard to imagine for a general service truck—or, of course, the truck was damaged beyond economic repair. About two years ago, I became aware that the MoD was selling unused or nearly new MAN SV trucks with very low mileages. I asked my noble friend the Minister a suitable Written Question, and my heart sank when, on 13 January 2021, I received this answer:

“Due to a change in threat assessments, a surplus of MAN SV6T ... trucks has been identified. To economise storage and support costs, a number have been identified for sale.”

We used to have what we called a war maintenance reserve; we obviously do not have one now. Would my noble friend give the same answer now? Are we still selling off perfectly serviceable MAN SV trucks? I ask, rhetorically, what signal does deliberately reducing our resilience send to a potential opponent? My overarching point is that our military capability is carefully measured by our opponents, as observed by the noble Lord, Lord West. They will pay particular attention to our resilience and whether or not we are serious about defence.

1.20 pm

**Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB):** My Lords, I start by offering my own mixture of welcome and congratulations to our two maiden speakers. The noble Lord, Lord Hintze, of Dunster, is a new friend; I knew his speech would be a mixture of the humility, warmth

and remarkable worldly wisdom that define him as a man. Such qualities make him a most welcome addition to this place. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, of Grantham, I know too well: he stalked me through the latter years of my military career. However, he went on to better things, as the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, and few in this Chamber will match his knowledge of international defence and security issues. As both their maiden speeches testify, we have gained enormously by their addition to our number.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, and welcome this debate on the resilience of the UK's Armed Forces. In many respects it is overdue, and it is probably the unfolding reality of conventional warfare at scale, in Ukraine, which has stirred greater concern in this House and more widely among informed commentators.

I will start with what might seem a somewhat offensive observation. It is very unlikely that we will get a wholly clear or candid statement on the resilience of our Armed Forces from a government Minister or even a chief of defence. That is not because they are habitual liars but because of three very obvious and, to be fair, largely defensible reasons. We do not want to parade the totality of our national military shortcomings to our enemies, nor internally always to our own Armed Forces, nor more widely to the British people.

When I was Chief of the Defence Staff, I know that, on occasions, I was either not allowed to speak or else had to publicly defend decisions on resources and capability using politically cleared scripts with which I was not always entirely comfortable. I was prepared to do this for a number of reasons. The first was the fact that, after all, it is not the responsibility of the Chief of the Defence Staff to determine the Government's spending priorities. Moreover, it is not the responsibility of the Chief of the Defence Staff to determine what level of defence and security risk the Government are ultimately prepared to tolerate. Both of these things are for the Government of the day alone to determine, and they are definitely not enviable judgments to have to make.

However, it is the responsibility of the CDS, supported by the chiefs of staff, to maximise the benefit in military capability terms of a given level of resources, to deploy those resources in support of government policy, and to confirm to government, in as accurate a manner as possible, the degree to which that military capability reduces the defence and security risks to the nation. To me, the key responsibility of the CDS, in this aspect of his role, is to be loyally but brutally honest to the Government about his judgments on resources, capability choices and national risk. Therefore, the least—I hope the best—we can hope for as a result of today's debate is the reassurance that the Government are being honest with themselves.

I make my contribution from the standpoint of an ex-CDS who believes that, in the specific context of war-fighting resilience, the situation today must—absolutely must—be even more concerning than it was in 2016 when I stood down. Drawing on my own personal experience as CDS, my first attempt, if you like, at moderated public honesty was in December 2013 at the annual Christmas CDS lecture to RUSI. In my address I first, I think, raised the spectre of the hollow

[LORD HOUGHTON OF RICHMOND]

force: a force I defined as increasingly built around exquisite platforms and around the capabilities that represented the iconic totems of a global power—capabilities perhaps more focused on supporting international prestige and a domestic industrial base than on rigorously based assessments of genuine national threats. In truth, it was a force that risked consuming so much of the defence budget on exquisite platforms that it was affordable only at the expense of manpower numbers, high-quality training and the stockpiles of war-fighting consumables that resilience on high-intensity operations require.

It would not be appropriate to publicly expose the detail of my private expressions of honesty to government. However, I will say that I wrote, formally, an annual letter to the Prime Minister, agreed with my fellow chiefs, offering a professional view on the state of our military capability. It was written in the clearest Yorkshire that I could muster. I can recall my final such letter to the Prime Minister, in summer 2016. I reflected one principal concern: that the strategic imbalance of investment between equipment, manpower, training, material support and infrastructure had effectively created the hollow force. The issue now was not the risk of the hollow force but whether the Government were happy to live with the reality.

Much has happened since I stood down in 2016 to suggest to me that the risk must now be intolerable. A number of external factors have occurred, many of them largely outside government control, which make the risk difficult to ameliorate quickly or cheaply. I offer three such factors, not to be exhaustive but purely as examples.

The first is that threats which were latent in 2010 and patent in 2015 are now realities, and the military outcome of the war in Ukraine will largely depend on a brutal test of national resilience. We are a part of that resilience, if only by proxy, and it seems, if the words of the current CGS are to be believed, that our contributions to date have already undermined and prejudiced our national liability to NATO.

The second example I offer is that, in pursuit of efficiency, we have created a defence industrial base in the UK which largely runs on supermarket lines: a competitive marketplace with just-in-time delivery, partly based on the guarantee of international supply. We no longer have the sovereign manufacturing base capable of sustaining war-fighting scales of consumption.

A third example would be my fear that we have done serious damage to our manpower resilience. We seem now, both institutionally and societally, unable to successfully recruit and retain. We have, by choice, reduced our military manpower strength; and, perhaps most remarkably of all, given the lessons from Ukraine and Covid, we have again neglected our Reserve Forces and have no plan in motion to address their purpose or vibrancy—although we have plenty of unacknowledged studies. I pause here to declare a personal interest, recorded in the register, as the president of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association.

As I said at the outset, it is perhaps not fair to expect a wholly candid or clear public statement on the resilience of our Armed Forces. Many, if not most,

countries involve themselves in either internal deceptions or external evasions about the true state of their military capability. President Putin is perhaps just the latest to be horribly surprised. But more widely, we need to face a disturbing reality. Simply put, what we ask of defence and our Armed Forces is based on a wholly unachievable set of mutually conflicting ambitions, given the current levels of funding. We simply cannot, at one and the same time, face the threat of land warfare in Europe, commit to a strategic tilt to south-east Asia, sustain a nuclear deterrent, undertake a maritime renaissance, be the default government response to strikes and domestic emergencies, contribute to the nation's prosperity agenda, help it to become a tech superpower and perform remarkable acts of state ceremonial, all while supporting a defence industrial base that looks first to its shareholders, and achieve all this with fewer people, not much more money and through a misplaced reliance on the enduring alchemy of efficiency.

I, among others, wait with bated breath for the outcome of the revisitation of the integrated review. I hope that the Minister will at least confirm that honesty and realism will be the review's defining characteristics, and that the regeneration of resilience in all its dimensions will result.

1.29 pm

**Lord Empey (UUP):** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Robathan on securing this debate. It has been punctuated by two excellent maiden speeches, from the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach; we welcome them and look forward to their contributions in the days ahead.

All the speakers who have so far contributed have significant military experience and background, as we have just heard. I do not have that background but I do not believe that matters pertinent to the armed services of this country are confined to those who have served. I therefore think it important that those of us who have not served contribute to the debate and express an opinion. I take an interest through the relevant APPGs and have done so since I came into this House. At the end of the day, decisions relevant to the armed services are political. Parliament and the Government must make those decisions. So resilience is as much a political decision as it is a military one.

Personnel and equipment are of course vital, but above all is the political determination on how they are used. We must not see this debate exclusively through the prism of Ukraine, because there are wider issues at stake. We are in the mess we are in in Ukraine in large measure due to particular international decisions that were not taken in the recent Syrian conflict. The red lines drawn by the United States were rubbed out and Assad and his henchmen were allowed to use poison weapons in that conflict. We have allowed Russia to move in, get warm-water port and pulverise large parts of Ukraine, while we have sent out the message that the West in general is a pushover. A dictator and a tyrant will see that. Of course, Putin got away with it in Georgia, and we have seen what happens.

There is even a parallel with the Falklands. It was the same thing, in so far as a dictatorship saw a weakness and said, "That country won't go to the far

side of the world to defend something". We did, however, and that sent a strong signal. Now, we are having to do the same thing on our own doorstep. I never thought that I would see battle tanks on the plains of Europe in my lifetime—I never believed that would be possible—but it is happening as we speak. The mistakes we are repeating go back to what happened in the 1930s when dictators saw weakness. Hitler could have been stopped but he was not because we were not ready. We did not have the capability; neither did our French colleagues. As a country, we continue to make the same mistake again and again.

We all know—certainly, those of us who are in politics know—that public expenditure, including on welfare, housing and all the social and other benefits we want our people to receive, is vital. With defence, however, we say, "Well, we used that in World War II. That's over now; we've sorted that out". We are losing the critical mass necessary to sustain an integrated defence capability that goes from the grass roots of recruits, right through to the industrial military complex, and to our capability and the question whether we actually have the political will to use it. It strikes me that we have repeated all these mistakes. There have been many reviews, which I am sure have punctuated the careers of all the previous speakers in the debate. They have seen this happen and know what is coming at the end of the sausage machine: "Let there be less, not more".

Importantly, while we must pay attention to cyber, drones and all the other modern warfare techniques, surely, ultimately, there is a necessity for volume. The Russians take the view that mass has its own capability and effect. Russia has a particular technique: grinding. Putin could not care less about 100,000 casualties. He will keep throwing people in there for as long as he can. Although he may have been disappointed at the reaction so far from NATO and the western allies and the heroic resistance of the people of Ukraine, I suspect that, in his deliberations, he says, "Well, we got that wrong. However, I'll keep grinding these people down. What will the position be in 12 months' time? How many more reserves of ammunition, vehicles and equipment will we have available then?" He will play the long game. We all know that.

So, although I have no doubt that my noble friend the Minister will give a spirited and coherent response, I must say this to her: the fact is that we are underprotecting ourselves. We are not paying the premium: we have got a cheapie, and there are so many caveats that it simply will not work. The noble Lord, Lord West, who has been beating the drum in this House on our naval capabilities for as long as I have been in it, has pointed out that we simply do not have sufficient surface vessels. As far as the Army is concerned, we must modernise. We have a huge problem with the estate on which our soldiers, sailors and airmen live. We have not resolved all those issues. I do not believe for one minute the figures on our reserve capabilities, from talking anecdotally to people back home. On paper, people are there, but they have not put in the hours of training and some of the vehicles they are training on are prehistoric. Let us bear in mind that we may have these headline figures, but they are not real.

In order to maintain a coherent manufacturing capability right the way through, we must learn from our mistakes. I do not see any evidence that we are learning. The same things are happening again to the procurement process; we just do not seem to be capable of getting that right. Then, we are still changing specs in the middle of contracts. How is it that one of the biggest defence contractors in the world cannot make a vehicle that does not shake its occupants to pieces? It is altogether out of order.

I hope and pray that the Government will look at this. We all know how tight expenditure is but, if we do not address these issues, our successors will pay in blood and treasure a price far greater than anything we contribute now.

1.38 pm

**Lord Bilimoria (CB):** My Lords, on 28 November, just under two months ago, I sat opposite Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at the Lord Mayor's Banquet. Let me quote from his speech:

"As Edmund Burke argued, circumstances and context are everything. And today the pace of geopolitical change is intensifying. Our adversaries and competitors plan for the long term. After years of pushing at the boundaries, Russia is challenging the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. China is conspicuously competing for global influence using all the levers of state power. In the face of these challenges, short-termism or wishful thinking will not suffice."

We have heard many brilliant speeches. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, said that size matters. What is the reality? The noble Lord, Lord Empey, has just talked about this. The number of recruits enlisted in the UK's Armed Forces has dropped by 30% as Russia carries on attacking Ukraine. There was a 17% rise in experienced personnel signing off in the year ending September 2022. Our excellent Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders, has warned that the country is weaker after donating so much equipment to Ukraine.

The reality is that the Army is shrinking to its smallest size since the Napoleonic wars. By 2025, it will be down to 73,000 troops. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for initiating this debate. In the debate we had in 2019 to celebrate the anniversary of NATO, which was well before the Ukraine war, I remember saying very categorically that we need to increase expenditure on defence to 3% of GDP. Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng, in their irrational exuberance, lasted for just a few days, but they were right on one thing: they wanted to increase defence expenditure to 3% of GDP. My noble and gallant friend Lord Stirrup said that the Treasury needs a more innovative approach and that critical mass matters. My late father, Lieutenant General Bilimoria, commanded a corps of 110,000 troops on the Pakistan border in Punjab and Rajasthan. The Central Command, of which he was commander-in-chief, had 350,000 troops.

NATO matters. When I was president of the CBI, the Ukraine war started and the following week I was invited by the EU ambassador to be the guest speaker at his weekly meeting of all 27 EU ambassadors. I said directly to the ambassadors of Sweden and Finland: "Are you now going to join NATO?" and they said, "We are ready to join in five minutes." Thankfully, they



[LORD BILIMORIA]

are now joining. Of course, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, who has phenomenal experience as a former Secretary-General of NATO, implemented Article 5. The reality is that NATO will stand together. People say, “What if Putin attacks Latvia or Lithuania?” We will stand and Article 5, I guarantee, will be implemented.

As the president of CBI, one of my proudest moments was straight after the war started. I reached out to Vadym Prystaiko, the Ukrainian ambassador, who has become a good friend, and asked how British business could help. In his office, we held a virtual meeting with leaders of British industry. Since the week after the war started, we have sent millions of ration packs to the troops in Ukraine. We sent medical kits that they did not have, we sent food parcels for people who are starving in the food basket of the world, and now, thankfully, the USA and the UK, above everyone else, although now everyone else is joining in, are sending the tanks in. Will the Minister say whether we should be sending more? Should we be sending missiles with a range of more than 200 miles? Should we be sending aircraft? I get asked that question all the time.

To quote again from the Prime Minister’s Lord Mayor’s Banquet speech:

“By protecting Ukraine, we protect ourselves. With the fall of Kabul, the pandemic, the economic strife, some said the West was weak. In fact, our response in Ukraine has shown the depth of our collective resolve. Sweden and Finland are joining NATO.”

How far are we prepared to go? How scared are we about retaliation from Russia? If we want to help Ukraine win this war, it is in reality our war for freedom and democracy.

The noble Lord, Lord Hintze, said that he is an honorary captain in the Royal Navy. I am proud to be an honorary group captain in 601 Squadron of the Royal Air Force. This was a very famous squadron that performed very well and with great valour in World War II in the Battle of Britain and in Malta and North Africa, and it has now been revived. The way in which we look after veterans in this country is not good enough. The Americans are so much better. People wear their uniforms with pride. Members of the public respect that uniform. In India, my 86 year-old mother can go into a canteen or a military hospital for the rest of her life. Veterans are looked after. I suggest that we do more. Does the Minister agree?

I am very proud to chair the Memorial Gates Trust, which established the memorial gates on Constitution Hill, which were inaugurated by Her Majesty the Queen 20 years ago. The noble Baroness, Lady Flather, had a huge role to play. The gates are there to commemorate and remember the five million volunteers from south Asia, Africa and the Caribbean who served in the First and Second World Wars. In the roof of the pavilion next to the gates are the names of all those who were awarded the Victoria Cross or the George Cross, including three from my father’s battalion, the 2/5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), who were awarded the Victoria Cross.

Earlier this month, I was in Jodhpur with His Highness Gaj Singh, the Maharaja of Jodhpur, to celebrate his 70th birthday. At the celebrations, I met

Brigadier Jodha, whose grandfather led the charge in the Battle of Haifa at the end of the First World War in 1918. I was privileged to speak at an event here in the House of Lords to celebrate and commemorate the centenary. It was the Jodhpur Lancers, the Hyderabad Lancers and the Mysore Lancers against the Turks in one of the last cavalry charges against machine-guns, and they won. This is the bravery. This is the reputation that this country has always had.

It was Field-Marshal Manekshaw, the former Chief of the Army Staff of the Indian Army, who said:

“If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or he is a Gurkha.”

That is their bravery. We are lucky: we still have thousands of Gurkhas, and I want reassurance from the Government that we will never cut our Gurkhas. The noble Lord, Lord Hintze, said that today is Australia Day. Today is also India’s Republic Day, and I will be back at the Guildhall today to celebrate that. Going back to 1961, Her Majesty the Queen was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade. My father, then Captain Bilimoria, was the senior ADC on duty on the podium with the President of India and the Queen.

Fast forward to a few years ago and the then Prince of Wales, now King Charles III, visited the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun. The links that we now have are absolutely phenomenal but, as the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, said very clearly, soft power without hard power is no power. We have this amazing relationship with India; our trade at the moment with India is £29 billion, but India is only the 12th-largest trading partner of the UK. It needs to be much more.

I said in a debate a week ago here in this House:

“The Indian express has left the station. It is now the fastest train in the world—the fastest-growing major economy in the world.”—[*Official Report*, 19/1/23; col. 2013.]

In 25 years it has a target to reach a GDP of \$32 trillion, to become the second-largest economy in the world. Are we going to be the best partners of India in the years ahead? I say that we should, and we will be even closer partners if we have closer defence ties with India beyond staff college and the Royal College of Defence Studies, the National Defence College and Wellington staff college—of which my father was commandant. We need closer ties. As we speak, a British Navy ship is visiting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, for joint exercises and much more.

I would go so far as to say—and I would be very interested to hear the Minister’s response—that I think that the UK should join Quad. Quad is the USA, India, Japan, and Australia: if the UK joins, we square the whole world round and it would be a really powerful force. I think we should bring back the Indian Army liaison officer role from the Indian Army within the British Army.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, spoke about morale. I think that esprit de corps is something that is greatly under threat if we have a morale problem. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, in his excellent maiden speech, spoke about innovation and research and development. Well, the reality is that we spend 1.7% of GDP on research and development innovation, and America spends 3.2%. We need to drastically increase our investment in R&D innovation.

So I conclude with this: we have, as a country, one of the strongest elements of soft power in the world. We have the highest-quality Armed Forces in the world, so we do have that hard power. But, as the Duke of Wellington's motto says, fortune favours the bold. We need to be bolder: we need to invest in our Armed Forces, to respect our Armed Forces, and to treasure our Armed Forces. They serve us; they serve our nation. It is our duty to never ever take our superb Armed Forces for granted, and to always be grateful to them.

1.49 pm

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, it is a privilege to take part in a debate where there are not one, but two, maiden speeches. The distinguished service of my noble and gallant friend Lord Peach, not least as chairman of NATO's Military Committee, speaks for itself and he will clearly contribute with great authority during our debates, not least as we contemplate the welcome accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, as referred to just a moment ago by my noble friend Lord Bilimoria. But we should also carefully note what my noble and gallant friend said about the Arctic, the high north, the Caucasus and the western Balkans.

I am especially pleased to be speaking in the same debate as the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, a long-standing and good friend. The noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of The Shaws, has a commitment away from the House today, but she would want me to recall the remarkable response of the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, when she was desperately trying to evacuate women judges from Afghanistan. Flights had to be arranged at great expense and the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, did not hesitate—in a “Schindler's List” moment—in finding the lion's share, making a spontaneous, generous and very substantial contribution to enabling women with a Taliban price on their heads to get out of Afghanistan. Some 500 people were evacuated; 103 were women lawyers and judges, all of whom, with their children and husbands, were on Taliban kill lists. I have met some of those women judges and know that the noble Lord's intervention, and that of the author JK Rowling, undoubtedly saved many lives. His voice is one which deserves to be listened to with respect and admiration across your Lordships' House, and I know that it will be.

Afghanistan is a good place to start in speaking to the welcome Motion of the noble Lord, Lord Robathan. Two years ago, the International Relations and Defence Select Committee, on which I have served, produced a report on Afghanistan. It warned of the consequences of an over-hasty, chaotic and shambolic withdrawal, putting at risk the gains that had been made, especially for women and not least in the protection of minorities, such as the Hazara, who now face genocidal attacks. I draw attention to two reports, one published only yesterday, by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hazaras.

The House should reflect on the effects of that chaotic withdrawal on our courageous service personnel and the sacrifices that they had made, but also on the message that it sent to would-be dictators and authoritarians around the world. It was significant, and should have come as no surprise, that one of the first photo opportunities organised by the Taliban was in Beijing, where, far from protesting about the genocide

against Uighur Muslims—I draw attention to my own non-financial interests in that regard—they were busy making deals with the leadership of the CCP. Like the new alliance between Russia and Iran, it is instructive how dictatorship attracts dictatorship: like attracts like. I invite noble Lords to note as well how dictatorships offer one another endless supplies of drones, weapons and munitions.

The increasing global threat we face from the CCP is one of the themes explored in the most recent report of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee. It is the culmination of 22 evidence sessions between April and November last year, 39 witnesses including the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, and visits to HM naval base Clyde and to the UK military in Bahrain and Qatar.

That report, *UK Defence Policy: From Aspiration to Reality?*, referred to by my noble and gallant friend Lord Stirrup in his terrific speech earlier, and its criticism that neither the 2021 integrated review or defence Command Paper provided a sufficiently rigorous sense of priorities, is worthy of a full-scale parliamentary debate. That should be here in the Chamber, and ideally taken together with the Government's proposed revision of both the IR and DCP. I hope that the Minister, who always treats the House with such respect, will undertake to make that request through the usual channels.

Although we should of course resist the temptation to draw premature, hasty or ill-considered conclusions while the outcome of the war in Ukraine remains uncertain, it is legitimate to raise questions about our long-term commitment to the defence of this realm. Indeed, some of the questions we have heard during the debate today are based on the Defence Secretary's own concerns, raised this week in advance of the Budget. The phrase “hollowing out” has been used again and again during the debate. It comes from him: he talks about the hollowing out of the military after decades of what he describes as underfunding and our inability to field a war-fighting division of just 10,000 troops. The Minister should enlarge on that. Is it right, as has been reported, that, despite a budget of £46 billion—the second highest in NATO—the hollowing out also means we are unable to field a carrier battle group with sufficient combat aircraft, or early warning radar aircraft, to protect our airspace?

The Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, in a previous incarnation said that we must “get real” about the need to invest in the Armed Forces and recognise that the first duty of a Government is always to keep their people safe. He pledged support for an increase to 3% of GDP. What is the Government's formal position on that? We look forward to hearing from the Minister when she comes to reply. France, Germany, Japan and the US have set out their plans to significantly increase spending. When does the Minister anticipate that what the Treasury has described as a “long dialogue” that is “nowhere near a conclusion” will be finalised? What is her assessment of the consequences for procurement of a weakened pound and high inflation?

Hopefully, Mr. Wallace says that

“we have started to upgrade our Challenger tanks, get Ajax armoured vehicles back on track and purchase upgraded Apache helicopters.”

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

I hope the Minister will also enlarge on this. I have regularly raised questions about the Ajax programme. It has been delayed for 10 years and cost taxpayers some £5 billion so far. Hundreds of soldiers had to be treated for exposure to high noise after working on trials. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee has described Ajax as “a litany of failures” and “flawed from the outset”, and said that these failures had put national security at risk. Can the Minister spell out how it has been put “back on track”, when it will be available to use, and how the Ajax experience is now influencing procurement policy, not least in the light of the criticisms of the report of the National Audit Office last year?

In the context of Type 32 frigates, multirole support ships and the shortfall in purchasing MLRS rocket launchers, how have criticisms been addressed? I draw the Minister’s attention to our Select Committee’s comments about greater parliamentary oversight of the planned increase in our nuclear deterrent’s warhead numbers, the budgetary impact, and the consequences.

The House should also note the Select Committee’s observation that

“one of the key lessons for the Government is the need to build greater resilience into the UK’s own stocks, supply chains, and industrial capacity.”

As we have heard again and again, not least from the noble Lord, Lord West of Spithead, just-in-time responses to these challenges simply will not do. The committee insists that we

“need to sustain a major hard-power contribution to NATO’s collective defence”,

and that that

“must remain a key driver of UK military posture.”

The inadequacy of weapon and ammunition stocks, and addressing our lack of industrial capacity, again referred to by my noble and gallant friend Lord Stirrup, should be one of the Government’s highest priorities. Although the UK’s response in Ukraine has been admirable throughout, what are we to make of the remarks of General Sir Patrick Sanders that giving 14 Challenger tanks to Ukraine would leave the UK “temporarily weaker” and put us at risk of failing to meet our NATO obligations? I would like the Minister to spell out how long “temporary” means. Are we satisfied that we will meet our NATO commitments? What we are doing to address the replenishment of resources that are being exhausted as the UK does its duty in standing with Ukraine in its existential fight?

Germany’s change of heart on Leopard tanks and the US decision on Abrams tanks are welcome. Presumably, though, it will take some time to ready the tanks and to train Ukrainian soldiers to use them. Can we be reassured that this is now in motion?

Finally, can the Minister assure us that the tilt to the Indo-Pacific will prioritise diplomatic, economic and political responses to the growing threat from China, rather than place further pressure on military resources? Will the Government please describe China as the threat it most certainly is to Taiwan rather than use the phrase “systemic competitor”, which is used in the integrated review?

Does the Minister agree that, in dealing with the CCP, we must first tackle the enemy within? I refer to the 42 universities that the *Times* reported only this week have links with Chinese institutions connected to espionage, nuclear weapons, hacking and the repression of Uighurs. Will the Minister urgently clarify what her department is doing to challenge, for example, the joint research between the University of Surrey and Beijing on artificial intelligence and face recognition software used by the CCP to identify Uighur Muslims and pro-democracy activists?

It disturbs me when, on grounds of national security, our most important Five Eyes allies ban CCP involvement in telecommunications, surveillance cameras and nuclear power stations, but the UK follows the money, diminishes its resilience and increases its dependency. Our trade deficit with China is now £40 billion. Recall how German dependence on Russia for energy has compromised its ability to defend democracy and sovereignty. We must not make the same mistake.

The UK remains an important partner in a variety of alliances, including most notably NATO, Five Eyes and AUKUS. In meeting today’s dangers and challenges, we must deepen and strengthen those alliances and our capabilities. The noble Lord, Lord Robathan, is to be congratulated and thanked for giving us the opportunity to address some of these important questions in your Lordships’ House today.

2 pm

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** My Lords, I was expecting not to need to declare any interests this afternoon. Unlike most noble Lords who have participated, but like the noble Lord, Lord Empey, I have not served in the military. I have been part of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme and am now a trustee of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust, which serves to enhance understanding of the military among MPs and Peers who perhaps need a better understanding of His Majesty’s Armed Forces, precisely for the reason that the security of the state is the first duty of government.

My noble friend Lord Alton has made me think that perhaps I need to declare an interest—and almost an apology—because one of the 44 universities named as having an interest in China is my University of Cambridge. I have no direct links with China and I do not believe my department does. I certainly have no role in espionage or anything else.

**Lord West of Spithead (Lab):** A likely tale.

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** I will move on, having declared the interest of being at Cambridge University.

Like all noble Lords right across the House, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for bringing this important debate. As we so often say, Members of your Lordships’ House from all Benches support our Armed Forces and wish to give them as much support as possible and to ensure that our decision-making and our funding for HM Armed Forces ensures that this country is safe and that our Armed Forces personnel are given all the support and finances needed to enable them to do their jobs and to enhance recruitment, retention and resilience.



In preparation for today's debate, I went back to Command Paper 411, *Defence in a Competitive Age*. It was written in a very different age. It is only two years old—March 2021—yet even then the situation in which the Secretary of State, Ben Wallace, was writing seemed to be one of relative peace. Russia and China were both listed as potential threats, as were Iran and North Korea, but we were not expecting war in Europe or the rather ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan—the successful Op Pitting but the humanitarian disaster we have been left with.

Almost two years after this defence paper, and in light of the further revisions of the integrated review, my first question to the Minister is: does she believe that His Majesty's Treasury—and indeed the Prime Minister, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer—understands the importance of the defence budget? It might be laudable to commit 2% or 3% of GDP but, in the face of a shrinking economy, high inflation and a poor exchange rate to the dollar, are we really increasing our defence expenditure and ensuring our resilience?

These are questions that have been raised time and again. The noble Lord, Lord West of Spithead, went back to *Hansard* to look at his own contributions and said that he has asked the same questions again and again. That is true of many questions that I have put to the noble Earl, Lord Howe, when he was Minister of State at Defence, and the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie. Are we actually putting enough financial resource into the Armed Forces?

I touched on Afghanistan. I was not aware of the involvement of the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, in helping women to get out of Afghanistan, although I was aware that the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of The Shaws, had done a fantastic job of supporting those women, so I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for mentioning that. I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, to his place. Following his excellent maiden speech, I very much look forward to his further contributions to your Lordships' House. It is so good to hear from someone who has military experience, as the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, pointed out, so he is most welcome.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, has also made his maiden speech. It is conventional to talk about people making excellent maiden speeches and say what a wonderful contribution they are going to make, but the extraordinary thing about the noble and gallant Lord's maiden speech today was that it almost was not a maiden speech; it fitted so perfectly into the flow of the debate that, if we had not had the word "maiden" on the speakers' list, we would not have remembered that it was a maiden speech. It was clear, excellent and important, and we are delighted to have further expertise on defence in your Lordships' House.

In his foreword to the Command Paper, the Secretary of State raised criticisms about previous defence reviews. He suggests that they were overly ambitious and underfunded. In the light of the debate that we have heard today, and of the commitments that the UK is seeking to make globally as part of global Britain, does the Minister believe that the current integrated review is not also in danger of being overly ambitious and underfunded? Do we have sufficient resilience?

The Secretary of State made a lot of important points but in the context of a world that was very different—with a different Prime Minister, with a different set of priorities, before the war in Ukraine, before the impact of that war on the British and global economies, and before the energy crisis. We are in a very different situation now. The notes that I made before I heard this debate have merely been reinforced by it, so my questions to the Minister reinforce those questions about the replenishment of equipment.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig of Radley, quoted my noble friend Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, when he said last week that the House deserves credible evidence on the replenishment of armaments and discussions with industry. We heard from the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, about the chaos—he did not use the word "chaos" but I think it might be a useful one—of MoD procurement. Although this is repetition beyond repetition, could the Minister tell the House, without breaching any commercial confidentiality, what discussions are being held with the defence industrial base to ensure that the UK's own domestic security is not being jeopardised by the support that we are giving to Ukraine? We stand united behind the Government in supporting Ukraine and giving it as much support as it needs, including tanks and artillery, but we also need to be reassured that, almost a year into the war in Ukraine, the Government have fully understood the significance of replenishment. We in your Lordships' House have not yet been reassured that supplies are going to be adequate, and the statement by the Chief of the Defence Staff did not really leave anyone feeling very reassured. Could the Minister comment on that?

Finally, I will devote my last couple of minutes to our Armed Forces personnel. The Command Paper rightly points out that

"Our people, from all four corners of the UK, the Commonwealth and beyond, are our most important resource".

That is absolutely right and it was reiterated by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, in his maiden speech, and by the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, who also pointed out the situation of veterans.

My friend in the other place, the MP for Tiverton and Honiton, Richard Foord MP, has been looking into that situation and ascertained, from a Written Question to the Minister in the Commons, that up to 200,000 veterans are at risk of homelessness over this winter. What is the MoD doing to support veterans and does the Minister feel that the Armed Forces covenant, which was enshrined into the Armed Forces Act 2021, is doing enough? Would His Majesty's Government be willing to look at whether empty forces accommodation could be made available, even on a temporary basis, for veterans at risk from homelessness? While I am at it, can the Minister tell the House what further work is being done to ensure appropriate accommodation for all our service personnel?

The noble Earl, Lord Attlee, pointed out that there seemed to be a lack of briefings. When I was first in your Lordships' House, I remember going to briefings in the MoD main building. The noble Earl, Lord Howe, would give us those briefings and there was often a map showing current deployments. That map had many points and it usually meant some support, which had

[BARONESS SMITH OF NEWNHAM]

often been offered by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. Yet there is always a danger that Prime Ministers offer to do things without necessarily thinking through the logistical consequences of their actions.

Our support for Ukraine is absolutely right but, beyond that, what efforts are His Majesty's Government putting into ensuring that repeated deployments do not fundamentally undermine the resilience of our Armed Forces? For their families, their training and their own well-being, it is vital that we give sufficient support to our Armed Forces. If we do not do that, the danger is that the defence of the realm will be damaged.

2.12 pm

**Lord Tunncliffe (Lab):** My Lords, I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and I thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for securing it. Like many others, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hintze, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, on their maiden speeches.

The resilience of our Armed Forces is a topic to be considered seriously at all times but there are two significant overarching factors making it even more pertinent at present, which I would like to set out before looking at various areas in more detail. One is the uncertain European security situation stemming from Russia's aggression; the other is the weakening of the foundations of our Armed Forces since 2010. When it comes to resilience, these two aspects tie perfectly together. According to the Government's own *UK Defence Doctrine*, which outlines the broad philosophy and principles underpinning our military, the key aspect of resilience

"is the ability to change readily to meet new circumstances".

We have new circumstances with Russia and Ukraine.

What we also have are policy and investment decisions, in the longer term and the immediate future, that reduce our ability to change to meet these new circumstances. That is, at its very core, a lack of resilience, and any way you look at it, maintaining resilience will always be more difficult with more than 40,000 fewer troops, 80% of the number of ships in the Royal Navy, and many fewer aircraft in the Royal Air Force. The most recent regular Armed Forces continuous attitude survey showed overall satisfaction with service life at only 45%. In 2009, it was 61%. Furthermore, the MoD has wasted at least £15 billion in taxpayers' money since 2010 and £5 billion since 2019.

The foreword to the Defence Secretary's Command Paper 411 states:

"If this Defence Command Paper is anything, it is an honest assessment of what we can do and what we will do."

To be honest is to look at the damage that has already been done and is continuing. The Government are proceeding with a further cut of 10,000 troops and a £2.3 billion real-terms cut in day-to-day MoD spending, meaning less money for forces' pay, equipment, recruitment, training and families. These decisions have weakened us at a time when we need to be strongest—for ourselves and our NATO allies, who have our unshakable commitment—in standing up to Russian aggression.

It is not just His Majesty's Opposition making these arguments. The Defence Committee in the other place published a report examining the integrated

review, Command Paper 411 and the industrial strategy. Among other things, it highlighted how the Ukraine conflict undermines the MoD's conclusion that mass is no longer important. The chair of that committee rightly highlighted that today's threats are arguably more dangerous and unpredictable than those faced in the past, and described the MoD's meeting all its integrated review obligations as "simply impossible" given the cuts to capability.

The Foreign Affairs Committee has quite directly called for an update

"in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine."

Our own International Relations and Defence Committee highlighted a significant number of challenges that all three branches of the Armed Forces are facing in making the Government's defence ambitions a reality, not least how the Ukraine conflict has exposed the inadequacy of equipment supply.

I understand that these updates are coming, but unless they come with a quite unexpected change in approach from the Government, I suspect the same question will remain. The Defence Secretary perhaps gave us some room for optimism when he said last November that

"as the threat changes, so must the size of everything".

None the less, I shall turn to a few specific elements of the Command Paper in more detail. Despite the broader picture hindering its efficiency, there are a number of interesting aspects, and I certainly cannot be as critical of its intent to modernise and adapt as I have of the implementation and factors surrounding that possibility.

The four objectives from the integrated review are the basis of the Command Paper and are admirable. Chapter 7's focus on modernising our forces through science and technology, coupled with necessary R&D investments, provides a number of opportunities, not least the obvious strategic advantage in an increasingly digital landscape, which we are all aware extends deeply into security issues. Recognising the importance of maintaining traditional elements of the Armed Forces should never mean that we cower from adaptation. If we did, we would be just as guilty of lacking the flexibility to change to face new circumstances. It is welcome that the Government are taking that seriously. The promise of

"one of the most integrated, digital, and agile forces in the world",

and the implications of cyberspace and space adding to the three more traditional elements of the Armed Forces, is welcome. However, I again emphasise that the traditional does not become less important just because of the presence of modern challenges.

In chapter 5, there is also a very welcome awareness of the importance of defence's contribution to global Britain, and of properly contributing to NATO and beyond:

"In an era of global competition and security threats, we must be ready to bring military support to our allies and partners wherever that might be needed."

Of course, we have seen this in action in the support and leadership we have offered Ukraine over the last year. Deterrence through collective security with our allies will always be one of the most effective ways of counteracting threats before they exist. When this is

not enough, collective action, as we are now seeing in Ukraine, is the only way we can face the more unpredictable threats of the 21st century.

There is of course one collective that we have dropped out of recently. I hope that any forthcoming update to the integrated review and other documents comes with an intent to form a new UK-EU security pact, as the Opposition have committed to doing, which would complement our unshakeable commitment to NATO and seek new co-operation across foreign policy through regular EU-UK summits and structured dialogue, in order to tackle Europe's shared threats in areas such as cyber, energy security and organised crime.

The conflict in Ukraine is also depleting our stockpiles, and Ministers have been moving too slowly to replace them. It took 287 days from the start of the invasion for the Defence Secretary to sign a new contract to replace the NLAWs for our forces and for Ukraine. We of course want to know whether the Government are responding to this in the shorter term by ramping up production of ammunition and equipment, and how many more contracts have been signed to replenish our supplies. In the longer term, given the ongoing concern about maintaining resilience, there is another question about what bearing these developments will have on the coming refresh of the integrated review.

Turning to a slightly more personal approach, my experience in the military consisted of being taught to fly by the RAF while at university and being promoted to an officer rank so low that it has now been abandoned. Subsequently, I served as a non-executive director of the Defence Logistics Organisation, the Defence Procurement Agency and the merged Defence Equipment and Support. I was taught by officers that, when you have finished all your planning and you get down to the actual fighting, you have to get three things right: kit, training and morale. I am afraid there are questions over all three areas, and I hope the new review will answer them. Kit has to be sufficient and appropriate, but there is a hidden danger: it has to be serviceable and you have to have the right reserves. Hollowing out is an insidious process that vastly underuses equipment and creates a lack of capability.

Training we hear less about, but, having been with the military, I believe that, when faced with making efficiencies—I deplore that term because it really means cuts—training has to come into its sights, and I am sure it does. If one could put military leaders under the appropriate pressure, I am sure they would say that training has suffered from the cost pressures.

Morale comes from all sorts of sources. It comes leadership—from above. Properly trained people with the right working equipment will have better morale. But we should also take account of other things. We must make sure that pay levels are sufficient to recruit and retain. We must make a real leap in accommodation, particularly married quarters. If you are going to get married people to go overseas and fight, they need not to be worried about what is happening at home. Finally, one has to have a positive approach to veterans, so that people who have devoted their lives to defending our country and serving our allies know that there is a future after they leave the Armed Forces.

I hope that the Minister, not necessarily in replying today but certainly when reviewing and rebooting the integrated review, will make sure that all the issues that have been drawn together today are considered, and particularly that we get ticks in those three important areas.

2.24 pm

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con):** My Lords, I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Robathan for enabling this important, constructive and certainly timely debate. There are surely few places in our country, outside of MoD headquarters, that are likely to boast as much defence expertise and experience as is gathered here under one roof.

I thank all who have spoken, including former Defence Ministers and former heads of our armed forces; every contribution has added an extra dimension to our understanding of the grave issues we are facing. Among those contributions, we were privileged to hear the maiden speeches of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, of Grantham, and my noble friend Lord Hintze. I think your Lordships would agree that the calibre of their speeches whets our appetite for hearing much more from them, and sooner rather than later.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is inevitable that there will be those who argue that the Command Paper, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, released in 2021, is effectively obsolete following President Putin's decision to invade Ukraine illegally. However, the main thrust of that document was correct, and it remains so today, because it identified Russia as our most acute threat. It noted that we are living in a more adversarial, multipolar and transactional international era. It committed the United Kingdom, despite tough economic times, to maintain its position as a leading NATO partner in Europe. Indeed, combined with the biggest increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War, it set a tone that other nations would later follow in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

It is also fair to say that the Command Paper did not anticipate, as no nation did, the sheer speed of change, nor did it predict how the impact of Russia's invasion would send shockwaves around the world, impacting global energy and global food supplies and precipitating a severe financial crisis. Separately, we are also aware that China is watching events closely as it escalates tensions with Taiwan, while states such as North Korea and Iran continue to pose complex regional challenges. Violent extremism has not gone away; terrorists continue to stoke the fires of instability across Africa.

So in this age of constant competition, the open international order on which our values have come to depend is under threat as never before—all that while rising costs are putting a sustained squeeze on defence budgets. Resilience has rocketed to the top of our agenda, and, in the short term, our first priority must be to continue to help Ukraine win back its sovereignty—I reassure my noble friend Lord Robathan and the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, on that.

In the past few decades, war has only been a theoretical possibility, but now conflict is actually taking place on this continent. We should be crystal clear—the Lord,



[BARONESS GOLDIE]

Lord Robertson, painted this in stark terms—that our safety and that our allies depend on Ukraine winning and Russia losing. Since the start of the conflict, the United Kingdom has been a leading supporter of Ukraine. We were the first European nation to supply it with lethal aid, providing £2.3 billion of military support and £20 million of humanitarian assistance in 2022. Already in 2023, we have committed to repeating that £2.3 billion of support, and we have underlined that we are in this for the long haul.

Recently, my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Defence has announced that we will send Ukraine a squadron of Challenger 2 tanks with armoured recovery and repair vehicles, as well as AS-90 guns, more uncrewed aerial systems, more ammunition and another 600 Brimstone missiles. That package is designed to help Ukraine to go on to dominate the battlefield and to move from resisting to expelling Russian forces from Ukrainian soil. However, while the tanks and guns are coming directly from our stocks, a significant number of the other donations are being purchased on the open market or supportive partners. Indeed, we continue to play a leading role in hosting and participating in donor conferences to encourage other nations to keep supplying Ukraine with the support it needs. Last week's Ramstein conference, for instance, was another opportunity to galvanise western support, with a number of significant pledges made. In particular, I laud and thank Germany for its recent decision to send 14 Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine and to authorise partner countries to send theirs in turn. That is a historic move, which we hope will have a decisive impact.

It is also vital to ensure that we act rapidly to replace the capabilities we lose; this point was raised by a considerable number of your Lordships. In December, the Defence Secretary announced a £229 million order for thousands more anti-tank weapons to replenish our stockpiles. Even as we give Challenger 2 tanks, we will be reviewing the number of Challenger 3 conversions following early lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

We will also build on the Army's modernisation programme under Operation Mobilise. The Army will accelerate its modernisation, the rebuilding of its stockpiles and the delivery of new tools, including Long Range Precision Fires and electronic warfare. Specifically on artillery, the Defence Secretary has announced the acceleration of our Mobile Fires Platform programme. It was earmarked for delivery in the 2030s. That will now happen earlier and, subject to commercial negotiation, an interim artillery capability is to be delivered.

Beside the short and medium term, we are giving thought to our longer term resilience. The mantra of the Defence Secretary throughout his tenure has been that as threats move, we must move to meet them. The aim at the heart of the Command Paper was to create leaner and more agile Armed Forces, which could be adapted to meet threats as they arise. Today we have a clearer picture of the more serious threats, as well as a renewed understanding of the vital importance of traditional war-fighting capability. That is why in the next couple of months we will refresh the integrated review and Command Paper.

One would have had to be dwelling in outer space during this debate not to hear the recurring theme, which I noted characterised every contribution. That, of course, is in relation to resource. I thought that it might be helpful just to provide a bit of backdrop. The Government recognise the vital importance of defence, as our record investment in 2020 and our unwavering support for Ukraine have shown. The 2022 Autumn Statement reconfirmed the Government's commitment that defence spending will not fall below 2% of GDP, and the Government recognise that further investment in defence will be required to meet the threats that we face and will consider that as part of the integrated review refresh.

In the 2020 review, when the MoD secured a £24 billion uplift in cash terms to its budget over four years to increase defence spending, that was the biggest investment in the UK's Armed Forces since the end of the Cold War. I have no doubt that a number of the distinguished contributors to this debate will reflect that, in their time of being in senior office, they might have wished that that facility had been offered to them. Our defence budget is currently the largest of any European ally. With that uplift of £24 billion in cash terms over four years, our participation in every NATO operation and mission and our declaration of the UK's nuclear deterrent to the allies, the UK will remain NATO's leading European ally.

I listened very carefully to noble Lords' observations. The defence Command Paper is ordered by the Secretary of State for Defence; it recognises what we need to do, responding to the changing threat environment and how we propose to do it. I have heard the explicit and clear messages: from my noble friend Lord Robathan, that "hard power is necessary"; from my noble friend Lord Hintze, that "soft power without hard power is no power at all"; from the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, that we must "restore hard power"; and from the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, that "size of capability does matter, and more resource is needed". The noble and gallant Lord added, colourfully, that there are no parsnips. There may be no parsnips, but I think that there are other vegetables in the larder worth mentioning. He is aware of the very solid investment programme and of really exciting opportunities for our three Armed Forces.

I was interested in the relatively sparse reference made in the debate to the critical domains of cyber and space. One of the absolutely fundamental tasks that the MoD is undertaking is that we have the digital backbone and we are recognising the need to respond to and be part of this digital age. We are engaged with our Cyber Defence Academy, and we are taking the steps that we need to take to ensure that in these new and for many people unfamiliar domains we are in there with our allies and partners, understanding what they mean, recognising the threats that they may pose but also exploiting the opportunities that they offer.

I listened with particular interest to the ideas from the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, for the Baltic and far north, and expanding the JEF. I am sure that that is a view that will resonate within the MoD.

The noble Lord, Lord West, repeated the plea for more resource, as did the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig of Radley, and my noble friend Lord Attlee.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton, referred to a communication that he had previously issued in his “clearest Yorkshire”. Let me reassure him today that I hear his clearest Yorkshire message. The noble Lord, Lord Empey, reprised the theme, as did the noble Lords, Lord Bilimoria and Lord Alton. It was also reaffirmed by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and the noble Lord, Lord Tunnicliffe. So I do not think that there is any doubt about the consistency, constancy and unanimity of the message coming from your Lordships. It is my job to ensure that it is relayed to where it matters, and I undertake to discharge that responsibility.

With reference to the integrated review and Command Paper, noble Lords will understand that I am not at liberty to pre-empt any potential announcements, but it would not be giving away any trade secrets to say that this will be an opportunity to create a credible and sustained force—a force ready for strategic state competition sooner, leveraging integration to make best use of our assets, and credible in our ability to deter our adversaries and respond to threats. It will also be about ensuring that we have the agile Armed Forces that we need for our brave men and women. I reiterate the sentiments expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and others. Our personnel, our Armed Forces men and women, are our most precious asset; we know that and we do value it. We acknowledge that there have been challenges for them; we are cognisant of the challenges and are constantly trying to find ways of addressing them.

In relation to service family accommodation, your Lordships will recall an earlier statement on that—I think it was the day before we broke up for Christmas Recess. I think that I was able to reassure your Lordships that there has been seismic change in how we are offering helplines and immediate and swift support, and taking steps to relocate personnel if accommodation is not habitable.

We need to be sure that we can deploy at pace to a range of threats and seamlessly transition between operating and fighting. Critically, the review and the Command Paper will be about creating a truly global force, collaborating alongside allies and partners to better counter threats and lever our economic, diplomatic and military might to pack a greater combined punch.

Let me now deal with some of the specific points raised by noble Lords. My noble friend Lord Attlee raised the matter of deployable divisions. My understanding is that, as directed in the defence strategy and defence plan of 2022, we have two deployable divisions: 1st (United Kingdom) Division, which provides a wide range of capabilities at home and overseas; and 3rd (United Kingdom) Division, which is the Army’s primary armoured war-fighting division. War-fighting capability, let me reassure noble Lords, remains the cornerstone of deterrence and the bedrock of a world-class British Army. I just want to reassure my noble friend Lord Robathan and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, on that.

Noble Lords will also be aware of the Future Soldier programme, which set out an exciting future for the military and a recognition that we are not necessarily dealing with mass numbers of people, but

working out how, by combining the skills of our people with the technological advances we now have, we can do things better with fewer people and do them more safely. Very often, we can use technology to deploy in operations where people previously were at risk; with the deployment of technology, that risk disappears.

The noble and gallant Lords, Lord Stirrup and Lord Craig of Radley, my noble friend Lord Robathan, the noble Lords, Lord West, Lord Tunnicliffe and Lord Robertson, and the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, all raised the issue of replenishment. In relation to replenishing stocks, the Ministry of Defence continually manages and reviews its stocks of weapons and munitions and these considerations inform what we give in kind to the armed forces of Ukraine. There are regular strategic supplier conversations throughout the ministry and we regularly fully engage with industry, allies and partners to ensure that all equipment and munitions granted in kind are replaced as expeditiously as possible. We are absolutely clear that we will never go below the safe line that we require for the security of our own nation.

A number of noble Lords asked specifically what we have been ordering. I can confirm that a number of substantial contracts have already been placed to directly replace our stockpiles. These include the replacement of the Starstreak high-velocity missile and the lightweight multirole missile. The next generation of light anti-tank weapons, NLAWs, are currently being built, and several hundred missiles will be delivered to UK stockpiles from 2023 onwards. A contract for further NLAWs was signed on 7 December 2022.

A number of noble Lords, particularly my noble friend Lord Robathan, the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, raised the matter of accommodation. As I said earlier, we are very cognisant of this. We have made investment and have developed structures so that nobody in our Armed Forces suffering unacceptable conditions should be left without help or a source of advice. I cross-examined officials to be sure that that is a robust system and was assured that it is.

I have some figures on recruitment, but in the interest of time I am going to offer to write to those noble Lords who raised issues of recruitment and, under that, I shall deal with the issue of reserves that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, raised. There is perfectly positive and, I think, encouraging information in there.

The noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and my noble friend Lord Attlee asked for a debate in this House. I am very pleased to be able to confirm that that debate will happen on 9 February. It has probably not yet been tabled in the bulletin of parliamentary business, but noble Lords can look forward to the perhaps dubious pleasure of me opening it and my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon winding it up.

On dealing with propaganda and misinformation, an issue of concern and interest to the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, we have used our own intelligence, in conjunction with the United States and the armed forces of Ukraine and Ukrainian intelligence sources, to start being a little more free handed about disclosing intelligence. We think that is the best way to neutralise the poison of lies and misinformation, and it has

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

proved to be very effective. In a previous debate, I referred noble Lords to a recent survey that had been carried out in Russia. It indicated that public support for the war is dropping in Russia, and that is very welcome.

On defence resilience and industry, which concerned many noble Lords, not least the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, along with a number of others, we have made major changes within defence. If we work on from the *Defence and Security Industrial Strategy*, published in March 2021, as a step change in our approach to industry, we now think about defence industries as strategic capabilities in their own right. The noble and gallant Lord is quite correct: we cannot do this on a feast and famine basis. That was something we discovered with shipbuilding. In fact, the national shipbuilding strategy, refreshed recently, has been very much welcomed by the shipbuilding industry, because it is giving it predictability, visibility and a sense of what lies ahead in the future. The noble and gallant Lord is quite correct that that is what we want to achieve across our relationship with industry.

The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, raised issues about our Armed Forces people. I absolutely emphasise how important they are. He asked about veterans, as did the noble Baroness, Lady Smith. I can confirm that we now have a Minister for Veterans, Mr Johnny Mercer; we have an Office for Veterans' Affairs; and very recently, in the Armed Forces Act, we had explicit provisions for the first time in relation to the covenant, to introduce a new legal duty in relation to health, housing and education. When these services are sought, wherever they are being sought, by veterans throughout the United Kingdom, there will be better support, making sure they can get the services they need.

The question of whether we can do more for Ukraine was on the minds of many noble Lords. I reassure them that we work closely with the armed forces of Ukraine. We analyse with them what they think their needs are, and I have said before in this Chamber that we do not do that in a silo of our own: we consult with our allies and partners so that we ensure that our singular contributions achieve the best aggregate output in terms of impact and effect. I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Alton, that the Indo-Pacific tilt is still a very important part of HM Government strategy. That is exercised through various conduits, including diplomatic and trade engagement, and of course defence is an essential part of that integrated offer to the region.

I am slightly over my time, but this has been such an important debate. I thank your Lordships for your indulgence and draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying that we are, in Defence, changing and adapting, we are learning from the lessons of Ukraine, and we are doing everything we can to ensure that we support Ukraine to secure victory, and ultimately build up a more robust resilience so we are ready for whatever strategic threat comes next. On the broader front of our defence capability in the present and the future, my right honourable friend the Secretary State for Defence has a reputation for honesty, tenacity, bluntness and leadership, and he will be a doughty advocate for Defence in his engagement with the Prime Minister and the Treasury. In that endeavour, he will certainly have

an important weapon at his disposal: the contributions of your Lordships to this debate, a cogent augmentation of MoD arguments for which I thank your Lordships profoundly.

**Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab):** Before the Minister sits down, could I urge her, in this electronic age, to copy any letters to everybody who has participated in the debate?

**Baroness Goldie (Con):** I will be delighted to do that. As your Lordships will have realised, such was the breadth and scope of questions that I could not possibly address them all in this debate, but I will certainly look at *Hansard* and undertake to deal with as much as I can by correspondence, and that will be placed in the Library, probably in electronic form, for access by anyone who wants it.

2.46 pm

**Lord Robathan (Con):** My Lords, first, I thank everyone who participated in the debate, and pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Hintze, formerly of the Royal Australian Army, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, formerly of the Royal Air Force, for their excellent maiden speeches. I said at the beginning of the debate that I would not bang on for too long because I knew there was much more expertise than I have. We have heard it all, and it has been very good, so thank you very much.

I would say that experience is not everything, actually, and war is too important to be left to generals. However, I know my noble friend has heard that experience that shows what a dire state we are in, and she has responded well, so I thank her. We are not looking backwards to the Cold War; we are looking forwards. We need to build on the highly admired Armed Forces, on their history and tradition, and have a better force going forward. When the Minister talks about being leaner and more agile, I think we all know what leaner means: fewer—it is quite straightforward. It is all very well having more command papers and strategies. I am sure Mr Putin and other potential adversaries are very interested. We need action now; we need more money now, and we need those insurance premiums that have been put in the bin for many years—over the last three or four decades—to be paid and we need money to be paid now.

*Motion agreed.*

## Net Zero

### *Question for Short Debate*

2.48 pm

*Asked by Baroness Hayman*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take in response to the report by Chris Skidmore MP *Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero*, published on 13 January.

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interest as co-chair of Peers for the Planet and express a debt of gratitude to Chris Skidmore MP and his team for providing the important, detailed and comprehensive



report that we have before us today. I am also grateful to all noble Lords who will be speaking and to the Minister himself for being here to respond, given his prodigious workload in your Lordships' House

It is worth emphasising at the outset that the *Mission Zero* report was not asked to provide a stocktake of the Government's progress on net zero—that is a job for the CCC. Rather, the exam question the review was set was whether, given the recent dramatic global changes, particularly in energy, the UK can meet its net-zero ambitions in a way that is affordable and efficient and encourages business and enterprise. The report's answer is an emphatic, "Yes, we can", but with the crucial caveat that we will achieve sustainable growth only if we are given the right leadership and policy responses from government. To quote Energy UK, the industry body,

"the Government must seize this golden opportunity to drive a broad economic recovery and become a global leader in new technologies for years to come. Based on the evidence set out in today's report, further delay would both be inexplicable and hand that economic opportunity to other countries."

The effects of a once-in-a-generation cost of living and energy crisis have, as we know, been profound. The global dynamic has shifted, and a great industrial race to decarbonise has been triggered, with the US, China and the EU leading the way. The private sector understands this very well, which is why industry and business leaders across all sectors are urgently calling for clear, consistent and stable policy direction, effective regulation and sectoral plans so that they can plan and attract investment for a pro-growth transition.

However, the business community is increasingly concerned that the opportunity to keep up with those leading this global growth race is slipping away from us. As the director-general of the CBI warned this week, a lack of government strategy risks "haemorrhaging" business investment and green growth to other markets. He flagged that at the very moment the US and the EU are going bigger and harder, we are seeing very little "urgency and boldness" from the Government. If economic opportunities are not to be lost and investment decisions delayed, we need an urgent government response to the call made in the review for greater certainty, consistency and clarity across net-zero policy. If we embrace that strategic approach, the UK has every opportunity not only to keep up but to lead.

We have already seen how forward-looking, well-balanced government policies and regulation can support the development of new low-carbon industries and British success stories. For example, we invented the contracts for difference model that has powered the breakout success and cost-competitiveness of the onshore and offshore wind industry. Such innovative models can ensure that we steal a lead in other technologies as well, including solar, geothermal, battery storage and carbon removals. Policy intervention and smart investment could also provide breakthroughs in other areas, from low-carbon steel to plant-based alternatives to meat; from electrified kilns for brickmaking and ceramics to green fertilisers.

While the next stage of the transition will undoubtedly require careful management, the UK has proven that it can pioneer complex system change and create

world-leading sectors in the process, where well-constructed, practical policy is in place from government to support that process. At the World Economic Forum in Davos last week, the noble Lord, Lord Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute, said:

"The world has in its hands a new growth and development story driven by investment and innovation in green technology ... it is a much more attractive and inclusive story than the dirty and destructive paths followed in the past."

However, to capitalise on these opportunities, we need to confront another major message from the report: at the moment, we simply do not have the necessary strategic planning, infrastructure and delivery mechanisms to nurture sustainable growth. It is evident that private and public sector stakeholders have little confidence that the Government are actually making good on the Prime Minister's welcome promise to ensure that UK climate leadership

"pervades all aspects of Government now".—[*Official Report*, 9/11/22; col. 263.]

The report highlights that we do not have the whole-government approach that such a multifaceted and complex challenge as the transformation of our economy—because that is what we are talking about—requires.

Of course, political leadership at the very top of government is essential, and the disappearance of the Cabinet committee chaired by the Prime Minister is hardly encouraging. However, we also have to recognise that policy change and delivery have to take place at every level, and that not only businesses but civil society and, crucially, local government all have pivotal roles to play. If we are to achieve the Government's aim of

"matching world-leading ambition with world-leading delivery", we need the structures in place to realise that commitment and secure the opportunities of net zero.

I therefore hope that the Minister will take very seriously the recommendations in the review aimed at overcoming the current lack of joined-up policy-making and to embed action across all levels of government, all nations and all departments. The Government should look urgently at two specific proposals in this area, put forward both by the review and by committees of this House and the other place: a net-zero test across government policies and legislation, and an office for net-zero delivery to drive policy in areas where progress, frankly, is painfully slow at the moment.

As the review says, unless the Government take a strategic and holistic approach to both policy and delivery:

"Climate commitments and net zero targets remain just words on a page without a clear, consistent, and stable transition plan."

It is clear to me from reading the report and from all the briefings I have received in the run-up to this debate, particularly from business, that not acting risks costing far more than the necessary investment to make the transition and the growth that will follow.

As an immediate positive response, the Government could show their direction of travel in areas where we actually have legislation going through this House and the other place. Energy efficiency is a no-brainer for most people. There are amendments to both the Energy Bill and the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill which

[BARONESS HAYMAN]

could transform both cost and quality of life, yet we are not making progress. Also, there is wide-ranging support from all sectors for giving Ofgem a regulatory duty to support the net-zero transition, so why are the Government opposing such amendments?

At COP 26 in Glasgow, Rishi Sunak pledged to make the UK the world's first net-zero financial centre. Yet the Financial Services and Markets Bill totally fails to take the opportunities to make that pledge a reality, and we are told that amendments are not necessary. The levelling-up Bill could catalyse action to support net zero by fundamentally reforming the planning system through the development of green skills and ensuring that our climate and nature objectives are in place, while also delivering the cheapest forms of energy generation: onshore wind and solar. Amendments already made to the Procurement Bill present opportunities to stimulate the innovative businesses and supply chains of the future. I therefore hope for a positive response from the Minister on these immediate issues and on the longer-term strategic direction.

We often discuss climate change in terms of the moral imperative we have to safeguard the future for our children, our grandchildren and the planet. For me, that imperative is overwhelming. However, I hope that for those who are anxious about the costs entailed in attaining net zero, this report will provide some comfort that at this global tipping point, responding to the climate and nature crisis is not only the right thing to do but the right economic strategy.

2.59 pm

**Lord Whitty (Lab):** My Lords, slightly to my surprise, I very much welcome this report by Chris Skidmore and I agree with pretty much everything the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said. Chris Skidmore has performed two key changes in mindset on this for us—if we are prepared to follow them.

First, it is now very difficult for the darker sides of His Majesty's Treasury and other bits of Whitehall—and, indeed, the less progressive elements of industry—to claim that there is a conflict between government intervention to improve economic performance and intervention contributing to our environmental target of net zero. Net zero is an economic strategy; it is the only one in town. The environmental is economical. What is good for carbonisation is good for economic progress and Britain's economic leadership.

Secondly, the report finds that the present policies for reducing greenhouse gases are clearly nowhere near sufficient—or, more accurately, are not yet being pursued sufficiently vigorously and in sufficient detail to add up to an effective net-zero pathway. We need to confront these big points. It is not news that we are falling short on a lot of our environmental targets; the Climate Change Committee points this out regularly. What is new is that we must now recognise that these failures are also profound economic failures. They will affect us economically in terms of our prosperity as well as being a setback to our achievement of the net-zero strategy.

We must recognise that, although dramatic changes in technology may come through in the coming decades and help us meet our net-zero goals, most of the

progress we make until at least 2035 will have to be done with technology that we already have or is already pretty close to proving. This means that we will need a much clearer map of technological choices and government decisions. For example, we need big early decisions on fuel and energy; on the deployment of new forms of nuclear power, including SMRs; and on the role of hydrogen.

Hydrogen is seen as a solution to our most acute problems in replacing fossil fuels. We probably need to use hydrogen for heavily energy-intensive industries and heavy transport such as marine, road, rail and, possibly, aviation. However, we cannot expect hydrogen to be produced in a green form that is also sufficient to provide a basis for heating our buildings. As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said, we probably need instead to mandate heat pumps or some other technology, such as district heating, together with a proper, solid, greatly enhanced energy efficiency programme, national installation standards for all new build and substantially greater, more targeted resources for retrofitting buildings. The other thing we need is a greater emphasis on land use and agriculture than is in the Skidmore report; not enough of it focuses on how we produce our food and use our land.

Thirdly, we need brave decisions on road vehicles. This means getting rid of all petrol and diesel cars more rapidly, probably with road rationing—by price or by zoning—as well.

Lastly, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said, we need coherence in government. We need proper cross-government machinery. A shadowy committee about which none of us knows and which has no clear conclusions and no clear strategy is not enough. We need a proper office for net zero, and it has to transcend the whole of Whitehall and, indeed, the whole machinery of government at all levels in this country.

3.03 pm

**Baroness Worthington (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for securing this debate. I echo her comments about the sheer number of opportunities ahead of us in the near term to address some of the recommendations in legislation before us, whether that is the Energy Bill, the Procurement Bill or the financial services Bill.

I also congratulate Chris Skidmore on not just the nature of the report but the process he undertook to gather evidence, which was comprehensive and cross-party—and done in such a short space of time as well. I have not heard a bad word said about it. There is absolutely no way one can do justice to the sheer weight of the report's recommendations in four minutes, so I will focus my comments on a specific, interesting issue in the report: the definition of net zero.

One of the recommendations that your Lordships will read features a new phrase, “geo zero”, meaning that we must unpick the concept of net zero to better understand what we are talking about when it comes to addressing fossil-based emissions—which are essentially bringing emissions out from under the ground, out of the lithosphere, and leaving them in the atmosphere for 1,000 years—and what we are doing with our biosphere, which is changing our land-use patterns.

Altering that is a very dynamic process of changing over time and in accordance with weather and climatic conditions. That is a very different set of uncertainties and data about how reliable that portion of our carbon account is.

The lithospheric, or geospheric, balancing act that we need to do to make sure that any fossil brought out of the ground is neutralised by permanent storage in the lithosphere must be addressed. It is a recommendation of this report. It is incredibly forward-thinking of Chris to have got his head around not only the day-to-day but this fundamental problem. It is important because increasingly we are seeing concerns about the sheer number of claims around carbon neutrality—“I’m net zero” or “I’m carbon neutral”—even to the extent that we have had coal mines approved based on being carbon neutral. No real standards apply to what that really means. Coal mines really cannot be equated with the vague planting of some trees somewhere in the world which may or may not survive. It needs some definition. This is an opportunity for the UK, because we happen to have some of the world’s leading scientists, land-use experts, agricultural colleges and carbon accountants, with probably a higher concentration of them here than anywhere else. So it is within our capability to do this.

We also have a tall tower network of very clever and very sensitive monitors that allow us to see what is happening in our atmosphere. People perhaps do not understand that when we submit plans to the UN or targets and budgets to the CCC, we are doing so on the basis of an inventory, which is essentially a spreadsheet, with people putting in numbers and hoping that those numbers are correct. However, we have these tall towers with sensors on them to cross-check whether that inventory appears to be correct. We have a proper, real-world, empirical backstop to our carbon budgeting. We are possibly the only country that does this. The only of two that have invested in this are New Zealand and Switzerland—so we are in a very fortunate position.

Therefore, with our desire to become a centre for green finance, our efforts to green the financial markets, and the fact that we have a huge number of people who are talented on this issue, we could start to develop proper, regulated standards that govern the market in carbon offsetting and carbon neutrality claims. We can do this. We should do this. It is in this report. I wish that I had more time to go into it. It is something that I strongly recommend that the Government take very seriously.

3.07 pm

**Lord Grantchester (Lab):** Chris Skidmore’s *Mission Zero* review is a very good sense check, an appreciation of the delivery of the measures that are needed and that are being undertaken in the UK at the moment, as the Government continue to undertake the huge challenge needed to cut back carbon emissions that are leading to the quickening of climate change. His voice adds encouragement to what Labour and many other concerned participants have been expressing for some time. Net zero, decarbonisation and clean energy growth will happen only if they deliver economic and other benefits throughout communities and modern life.

For this to happen requires consistency and clarity in purpose and policies, and certainty for businesses and local authorities that the constant switch on and switch off of measures must not persist. Continuity in the length of funding commitments must be assured. The crippling of the solar industry that happened in 2015 under the Cameron Conservative Government must never happen again. The most important message is that a stability of approach requires long-term planning and a constant regulatory environment for our ambitions to have any chance of delivery. These important guardrails on page 40 must be heeded.

The second important message that this review underlines also chimes with Labour’s message. It is that delay creates new consequences, costs are increased more than previously anticipated, and inaction or doing little and more slowly is more costly than any disruption to the status quo, because the status quo is already adding to the problem.

The Government have been slow in their decision-making, leading to delay in crucial areas, slow in encouraging future investment from industry, slow in their recognition of their mixed messages, and slow in their recognition of the importance of behaviour change needed, as shown in your Lordships’ Environment and Climate Change Committee report.

The UK’s comparative advantage of offshore wind and green finance is being eroded, especially through skills shortages and inconsistent policy commitment towards infrastructure. The UK could have an extra 2% of growth in GDP through new jobs and reduction of fossil fuel imports. The UK is suffering from an antiquated approach of grid connections to the nearest point on the onshore network, when the need is to transport electricity around Great Britain. The Minister will know that the holistic network design requires concerted investment of some £60 billion over the next five to 10 years. Is he able to update the House on the Government’s plans to achieve this today? Labour has committed to some £28 billion a year for 10 years to get the UK nearer to net zero.

The Climate Change Committee and the Government need to review the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, in view of the increased pace needed for the net-zero commitment by 2050, and the announcement of the UK’s nationally determined contributions in Glasgow. The Climate Change Committee has already reported to Parliament that the Government are not on track to deliver on all their commitments.

To update on where the UK now stands, the review also calls, under objective 16, for a land use strategy. The House has been well served by the specialist inquiries committee’s recently published report *Making the Most Out of England’s Land*, drawing attention to the importance of the multifunctionality of land, and a modern planning approach across all government departments. Can the Minister commit the Government—with BEIS and Defra in mind—to producing this strategy this summer, alongside a refreshed net zero strategy, as necessitated by the courts during spring this year?



3.12 pm

**Baroness Scott of Needham Market (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for securing today's debate so soon after the publication of this excellent report. In his report, Skidmore says that

"there must be more place-based, locally led action on net zero. Our local areas and communities want to act on net zero, but too often government gets in the way. The Government must provide central leadership on net zero, but it must also empower people and places to deliver."

I could not agree more. At this point, I should declare an interest as President of the National Association of Local Councils, the representative body for town and parish councils. They cover everything from the tiny parish in which I live, with a precept of a few thousand pounds, to some of our largest towns with budgets of many millions.

So, as the first tier of local government, they should not be overlooked in the delivery of net zero. Many are already providing place-based, locally led action. Many have put climate change on their agenda and are actively looking for ways in which they and their communities can play their part in delivering net zero. If time permitted, I would share with the House some of the many case studies of strong local leadership and practical projects, such as tree planting, recycling schemes, car charging points and much more.

With their clear place-based remit, they are uniquely positioned not just to act themselves but also to act as a catalyst for community and faith groups, local businesses and local government at other levels. Crucially, they can ensure that action is not just concentrated in large urban centres, and that even rural parishes can play their part. So, when the Government come to consider recommendation 20 on the establishment of trailblazer net-zero communities, I do hope that at least some of them will be led by ambitious town and parish councils with a proven track record. But they could do more. These councils need to be empowered by extending the general power of competence, and by the removal of administrative barriers.

Government funding streams are, frankly, a mess. Across government, there are too many funding streams that are too complex, too expensive to administer and deliver and often incoherent. That is not just my view but that of the NAO. Indeed, the Climate Change Committee has made many of the same points on this agenda. Local authorities now find that they cannot bid because they simply cannot afford to. The Government should undertake a massive simplification, particularly with regard to net-zero funding, and ensure that, this time, town and parish councils are entitled to bid and play their part, because they are often denied access.

I would add the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to the list of Bills that have already been mentioned. There is an opportunity to do some of this quite quickly, since what I have said reflects not just what Skidmore said but what all the organisations that gave evidence to him said. Parish and town councils are leading the neighbourhood planning revolution, and they will be vital to the next stage of delivering net-zero neighbourhood plans with their communities and their buy-in. However, that Bill offers some challenges to

the neighbourhood plan process, and we will explore that as it progresses. Can the Minister assure us that the levelling-up Bill will be assessed against Skidmore's report to make sure that it is not actively working against it?

Polling shows that there is a great public appetite to do more, but people are unsure about how best to contribute. It all feels somehow remote and too big for them as individuals to make a difference, but local action can bridge that gap by involving people and communities and making a real contribution to net zero.

3.16 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Scott of Needham Market, who picked up many of the points that I will seek to expand on. I declare my position as a vice-president of the LGA and of the NALC. I will focus on larger councils, as well as town and parish councils. There are 129 recommendations to debate in this hour. I will focus on two of them.

The first is the recommendation to end the disjointed mess of short-term, competitive local authority funding pots. As the Skidmore report says, that would enable communities to maximise the economic and social benefits of net zero while using resources most effectively. As Professor Tony Travers often points out, local government is a very efficient spender of funds, often more efficient than central government. The Government need to sit down with local government and ask it—not tell it—how to achieve net-zero targets, starting at the local level, and realise that this is the way resources can be put to best use.

The second point the Skidmore review highlights is also a story of localism: the importance of the community energy sector, which the report says is "neglected by government" and

"a distilled example of energy security and sovereignty".

The Local Electricity Bill has been tabled in the other place. In your Lordships' House we have an amendment that I tabled to the Energy Bill in Committee that will come back on Report. This is a huge opportunity—dare I say an oven-ready plan?—to unleash community energy, with possibilities for net zero and local prosperity. It is sitting there; the Government simply need to pick it up. I note that there is very strong Tory support for it in the other place.

However, as the noble Baroness, Lady Scott, just said, all this crosses over very much with the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. The levelling up fund disasters we just saw were hugely wasteful, yet we see the same model in the social housing decarbonisation fund, in various schemes for private home energy efficiency, such as home upgrade grants, and in transport decarbonisation funding. Central government throws out a random pot of money and says, "Bid for this quickly", and local government at all levels has to scramble. That is not an efficient model. It has always been a problem, with turnarounds on bidding and spending that drive inefficiencies rather than efficiencies, but it is even more of a problem now, with inflation meaning that, for example, capping rules on spend per house have made it even more difficult to spend the allocations because the cost of insulation is going up so fast.

We saw that in the levelling up fund only shovel-ready projects were able to bid, so councils had quickly to scrape together ideas and things that were already in the pipeline rather than planning for the long term, which is what the efficient use of money and the delivery of net zero and workable schemes demand. We need the Government to allocate money strategically on the basis of need and on a long-term basis. This is the case for local government spending. In terms of community, it is simply a case of setting people free to do what they are desperate to do. Communities want to get together, find good uses for local money, build local prosperity, supply local energy and get on with tackling the net-zero challenge. A climate emergency has been declared by 409 principal authority councils. They want to act and communities want to act. As this review makes clear, the Government have to let them.

3.20 pm

**Viscount Stansgate (Lab):** My Lords, in my experience it is relatively rare to have the opportunity to debate a report so soon after its publication, so I congratulate the noble Baroness on securing the debate. I hope we will learn a little more about what the Government think of it when the Minister comes to wind up.

It is 27 years until we reach the legal requirement to reduce our emissions by 100% from the 1990 levels, although it has been only 15 years since our Climate Change Act set the UK on the road to being the first country to introduce legally binding targets. In this context, Chris Skidmore has done a very good job and performed a very useful role in the short space of time given to him, even in the light of his “pro-business, pro-enterprise and pro-growth” remit. It may be that his report is one of the enduring legacies of the short premiership of the previous Prime Minister.

In the very short time we have, I will make only a few points. First, this report takes into account major recent developments, such as Ukraine and its consequences, and hence emphasises the links between net zero, future UK energy security and the infrastructure needed to support new and greener fuels, but we are lagging behind on the infrastructure, and I am not even sure whether the country yet grasps the upheaval needed to adapt the national grid to enable renewable sources of energy to be fed back into the system.

Secondly, some of the specific recommendations are welcome—for example, the creation of an R&D road map to ensure that priority technologies can deliver the UK’s net-zero and growth ambitions. I hope that in his reply the Minister can tell the House whether the Government endorse this approach and, if so, what action they intend to take accordingly.

Thirdly, the report emphasises that:

“Net zero is the economic opportunity of the 21st century.”

That is true. To adapt a well-known marketing phrase, “The future’s bright, the future’s green”, but it is also true that the world is a highly competitive place and the UK risks falling dangerously behind when our major competitors, such as the USA, the EU or China, are fast developing their green economies. You have to hand it to the Biden Administration. Under the heading of the Inflation Reduction Act they are now investing staggering sums in clean technology, and significant

investment is also being made by France and the EU. Talking up our opportunities is one thing, but if we cannot even get a gigafactory for batteries built in Blyth, we will not reach first base.

Fourthly, the report calls for

“clarity, certainty, consistency, and continuity”.

I entirely agree, but it is easier said than done. It is critical that the next steps we take have sufficient bipartisan support to enable them to survive beyond the next general election and to be continued and expanded by the next, perhaps very different, Government. Between now and 2050, how many general elections and future Governments will we have? How much risk is there that the sustained progress we need will not be sufficient? I mention this because on the long road towards net zero we have to have a change in attitudes and approach, and it has to be sustained and embedded over the next three decades, no matter what Government we have.

Finally, we do not have the option of not taking action. This is one of those subjects, and one of those reports, where not taking any action is nevertheless tantamount to making a decision. In this case, not taking action is the wrong decision.

3.24 pm

**Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab):** My Lords, I declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I add my sincere thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for her excellent introduction and for securing the debate today. As the noble Baroness, Lady Worthington, has said, with over 300 pages and 129 recommendations, we are not going to get into the detail that some of us might have liked to today, but I will add to the comments that the review is welcome. I thank the many external organisations that have sent us all briefings, and of course the House of Lords Library for its informative and detailed briefings. It is good to follow on from last week’s debate on the report from the Industry and Regulators Committee. I think we are starting to get a head of steam, if that is the appropriate term, around this debate when it comes to securing interest.

The report is timely and welcome. Given that the author, Chris Skidmore, remains a sitting Member of Parliament for the party in government, there is an obvious question for the Minister: does it have the support of the current Prime Minister? I have to say it is concerning that the report might not even have been produced had the High Court found that the Government’s net-zero strategy was lawful. With the nine-month period that the court gave to amend the strategy soon to elapse, we are hoping and expecting to hear that the Government have listened.

What strikes me about the report is the positive tone throughout, as we have heard, emphasising the opportunities that lie ahead. We have a duty to ourselves and to each other to achieve net zero and halt the impact of global warming, but too often the debate focuses only on the challenges, costs and inconvenience, and fails to acknowledge the opportunities that net zero can bring. Not only does that approach miss a large piece of the picture but I am sure that it is not the most effective way to motivate people to make significant

[BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS]

changes in the way that they live and work. At the very least, presenting both the urgent requirements for change and the opportunities is vital.

As we have heard, the review is positive about the economic opportunities that the agenda presents to this country in the years ahead, as my noble friends Lord Whitty and Lord Stansgate have mentioned. We are talking about £1 trillion-worth of goods and services to enable global net-zero transition, 500,000 quality jobs by 2030, and increased energy independence and therefore security. These are transformational benefits for all, while reducing the catastrophic level of damage that global warming can and will cause if left unchecked.

It is disappointing that the report states that the UK's ambition has not been matched by delivery and is slowing progress and missing opportunities. We have long called for progress in this area. The four Cs of clarity, certainty, consistency and continuity asked of government would be useful in most situations but, when it comes to net zero, they are essential. I therefore ask that, today, the Minister gives us a detailed update on where the Government are up to with the delivery of their strategy and plan for net zero. We do not need another tour around the different, and of course very welcome, investments already being delivered. The problem is that they are not joined up, the approach remains piecemeal and fragmented, the communities strategy is still not developed and the question of leadership remains unresolved. The Government's lack of coherence, and therefore the impression of a lack of grip and urgency, needs to be dealt with at pace.

3.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Callanan) (Con):** My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for securing this important debate today, and to the excellent contributions that we heard from all parts of the House on this extremely important issue.

I start my response by answering directly the question of the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, on the UK Government's plans. These plans are already well advanced. We have made great strides in our actions to tackle climate change, as the noble Baroness and other noble Lords will be aware. In 2019, the UK was the first developed economy to set a legal commitment to reach net zero by 2050. This was followed by the 10-point plan, published in November 2020, which sets out our plans for what was then termed a green industrial revolution.

Building on the momentum of that plan, in October 2021 we published the *Net Zero Strategy*, setting out a detailed pathway to meeting our carbon budgets and net-zero targets. This was in turn followed by the *British Energy Security Strategy* in April 2022, accelerating our ambitions towards cleaner energy. It is well worth remembering that, since publishing the net-zero strategy, economic conditions have of course changed significantly due primarily to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Energy prices and inflation have both risen sharply—the former, as we know to our cost, to record levels.

In the light of all that, in September 2022 the Government appointed Chris Skidmore MP to chair an independent review of our approach to setting our net-zero 2050 target, to ensure that we deliver our legal commitment to reach net zero by 2050 in a way that is pro-business and pro-growth, given the tremendous changes that we have seen in the economic landscape. The review heard from businesses, academia, individuals and local government across the country that net zero is in fact creating a new era of change and opportunity. It explains the opportunities and benefits of net zero for individuals and the economy, and specifies the actions needed to catalyse change in individual sectors of the economy, through to how we enhance the role of local authorities, communities and individuals—all to help deliver a just transition.

The review confirms what the Government have understood for years now: that the benefits of net zero far outweigh its costs. As the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, observed, the costs of global inaction significantly outweigh the costs of action. Delaying action will only put future generations at risk, and the UK's approach demonstrates that green and growth can go hand in hand. The UK's net-zero transition provides lots of exciting investment opportunities for the private sector, all of which we are doing our best to leverage.

The noble Viscount, Lord Stansgate, pointed out the risks of the UK falling behind in the global race to net zero, and was right to do so. The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK remains an attractive destination for private investment, and we have an excellent story to tell on attracting that very green investment which we need to see. Bloomberg New Energy Finance estimates that, in 2021 alone, around £24 billion-worth of new investment was committed to the UK across our low-carbon sectors. Done right, the net-zero transition will provide huge opportunities for jobs, investment, innovation and exports. While the noble Viscount was right to point out the disappointment of the Britishvolt situation, the site remains an excellent location for a battery gigafactory and the Government stand willing and able to commit substantial levels of investment and support, if the right investment opportunity comes along. I know that the local authority is also committed to that, so we remain optimistic on that site.

The noble Baroness, Lady Blake, asked me whether the review has the support of the Prime Minister. I can certainly confirm that the net-zero strategy remains government policy and has not been quashed. There was no criticism of the substance of our plans, which remain well on track; in fact, the claimants themselves described them as laudable during the proceedings. The review even confirms that the net-zero strategy of 2021 is still the right pathway.

The noble Baroness, Lady Worthington, commented on the definition of net zero itself. I was very interested in her remarks, and I know that Chris Skidmore talks about this. The Committee on Climate Change agrees that greenhouse gas removal technologies will be essential for reaching net zero, balancing residual emissions from hard-to-decarbonise sectors, while providing, at the same time, new economic opportunities. It also recognises that we have made a great deal of progress.



As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, says, we have delivered innovative policy mechanisms. She referred to the contracts for different scheme and I totally agree with her: the officials who dreamt up that scheme deserve whatever bonuses they received, hopefully, that year, because their scheme has been so successful that the rest of Europe is now seeking to follow on from the success of our offshore wind programme—in fact, to such an extent that constraints will probably be put on the supply chain in our attempt to ramp up production even further. It has contributed to a 500% increase in renewable energy since 2010 and helped us to become a world-leading country in offshore wind and advances in transformative technologies such as carbon capture and electric vehicles. One in six new cars sold in this country is now electric.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, referred to the ways government is set up to deliver net zero. In the past few years we have gone further than ever before to ensure that the climate is at the heart of our decision-making. For example, we have taken new approaches to embed net zero in spending decisions, including requiring departments to include greenhouse gas emissions in their spending review bids and their impact on meeting carbon budgets and net zero. We continue to build on the strong progress we have already made. Certainly, we have many exciting policy announcements in the coming year—if the House will have a little bit of patience. As many Members know, we already have the Energy Security Bill in Parliament, which will help deliver an energy system that is cleaner, more affordable and more secure.

The noble Baroness, Lady Worthington, and the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, both rightly mentioned our world-leading centre for green finance. Both will therefore be very happy to hear that we are committed to publishing an update to our *Green finance strategy* early this year, setting out how we will continue to mobilise finance for the UK's energy security, climate and environmental objectives and maintain our position as a leading green finance hub.

I also recognise, as a number of noble Lords observed, that local authorities can and do play an essential role in driving local climate action, with significant influence in many of the national priorities across energy, housing and transport which will be needed to achieve net zero. They are delivering the vast majority of our energy efficiency programmes, such as the public sector decarbonisation scheme, the social housing decarbonisation fund and home upgrade grants. These are all delivered through some of our excellent, innovative local authorities.

The noble Baroness, Lady Scott of Needham Market, mentioned joining up net zero and levelling up. The levelling-up White Paper outlined that the new UK shared prosperity fund will support interventions which reinforce the Government's commitment to reaching net zero by 2050. This includes providing up to £2.6 billion for investment for places, including for community infrastructure projects. As of January 2023, the local net zero hubs are working on a pipeline of projects with a projected total capital value of around £4.4 billion.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, commented on the need for local delivery of net zero. As I have already mentioned, we work very closely with local

authorities and their representative bodies to discuss their role in net zero. They are already contributing a lot, and I am sure we will want to examine how they can contribute even more in future.

As new technology will be critical to the transition, the Government are looking forward to publishing the net zero research and innovation delivery plan shortly. It will set out the Government's current portfolio of research and innovation programmes, which are backing Britain's most innovative businesses to develop the next generation of technologies needed to deliver our net-zero ambitions.

In conclusion, as I have set out today, our net-zero target remains a government priority. I can assure the House that we will carefully consider the recommendations made in Chris Skidmore's review. We will of course provide a full government response later in the year. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, again for securing this debate.

## Vulnerable Teenagers

### *Motion to Take Note*

3.39 pm

*Moved by Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top*

That this House takes note of the report by the Commission on Young Lives, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, published on 4 November 2022, and the life chances and educational prospects of vulnerable teenagers.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab):** My Lords, at the end of last year, the Commission on Young Lives, chaired by the former Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, published its final report. The commission and Anne are to be congratulated on this important piece of work, which challenges us all. The commission was launched in 2021 to devise a new and affordable national system of support to prevent crisis and improve the life chances of young people at risk of criminal exploitation, serious violence or getting into trouble with the law. The panel of commissioners included experts in the education system, children's mental health, youth work, policing and crime, charities and organisations that work closely with children at risk of harm. They were people who know about these things and know how to get things done.

Many thousands of children in our country are falling through gaps in the education, care and mental health systems. They are then exploited by gangs, organised criminals or abusers. These children are at risk of unthinkable violence and harm, are being groomed into crime and have hugely reduced life chances as a result. As the commission's report sets out very clearly, our response as a country to helping these children avoid this fate is often so inadequate. We are poor at identifying who they are, at sharing information and at communication, and we are almost always unco-ordinated.

And as the Lords Public Services Committee argued in our report published last year, the investment we have put into protecting and supporting vulnerable young people has fallen dramatically since 2010. At the same time, the organised criminals and groomers who exploit vulnerable teenagers are well co-ordinated.

[BARONESS ARMSTRONG OF HILL TOP]

Their business model relies on young people, and they will use coercion, control and manipulation to push them into criminal activity. They are highly skilled at identifying and entrapping young people, who often become too scared to walk away.

The commission's final report is called *Hidden in Plain Sight* for a reason. This is a national problem that is hidden by the nature of its ties to criminal activity, but, in many ways, it goes on in plain sight. It is an open secret among professionals who work with vulnerable children, and our public services also know that this is going on. Police spend a huge amount of time and resource stepping in to cover for other, struggling services, by finding vulnerable children who have gone missing from the care system, for example, or dealing with safeguarding issues. Schools are having to do so much more beyond simply teaching. Some feel that they are almost becoming a branch of social services. NHS staff working in trauma units tell stories of treating teenagers arriving with knife or gunshot wounds. Social workers and others working in children's social care often work with children who are taken into care for their own protection from serious violence, but who are then placed in accommodation miles from home with little support, only leaving them even more vulnerable to the exploiters who go looking for them.

We see the gruesome headlines of young people around the country being knifed and killed. The report opens with a story of a gang on a housing state. The gang members were involved in delivering drugs 80 miles away, using scooters and cars stolen from takeaway food delivery drivers. The boys in the gang were all around 14 years old, and all of them had been excluded from school and sent to a local pupil referral unit, although none of them seemed to attend.

Local families were terrified. Those teenagers carry knives and other weapons, which, in turn, was encouraging other young people in the area to carry knives for protection. Younger children were now starting to follow the group around and mimic their behaviour. As the commission's final report says, this sounds

"like an extreme example, but it is far from unique."

The report warns:

"There are parts of our country where the state is completely failing in its duty to protect vulnerable children ... often these are ... the most marginalised"

and poorest families, and, disproportionately, they are from black and minority-ethnic communities. However, it is not a problem that is

"limited to the most deprived parts of inner-city Britain",

as I know from the small town in the west of Durham that I called home for a long time. Young people from ordinary, decent families were groomed by predators working somewhere where nobody expected them and where agencies were slow to react. These problems stretch right across the country, from our biggest cities to small rural villages. We know that organised criminal networks are exporting illegal drugs into different areas using dedicated mobile phone lines, social media and so on. We also know that their success relies on finding and exploiting children through coercion, intimidation and violence.

As the commission sets out,

"there are hundreds of thousands of young people in England who are growing up in very vulnerable situations"

who become easy pickings. Some are living in very challenging families; many will have poor mental health; and many will have special education needs. Others encounter risks outside the family. Some will have fallen through the gaps in the different systems: they will be excluded or missing from school, or in vulnerable care settings, not receiving support for their special educational needs or not meeting the very high thresholds for current mental health services.

The numbers are not small. In 2021-22, there were over 16,000 instances in England where child sexual exploitation was identified by local authorities as a factor in assessments by social workers. There were 11,600 instances where gangs were a factor and 10,140 instances where child criminal exploitation was a factor. We know that this is just the tip of the iceberg, because those involved in gang activity and criminal exploitation are disproportionately young, vulnerable and often unknown to services. It has been estimated that there could be as many as 200,000 children aged 11 to 17 in England who are vulnerable to serious violence due to levels of crime and/or income deprivation in their community. A recent report by the Youth Endowment Fund revealed almost four in 10 children said they had been

"directly affected by violence in the last 12 months (either as victims or witnesses)."

We should view the failure to keep at-risk teenagers safe, and to support them to succeed, as a threat to our country's prosperity and security. It is a waste of talent and potential, and it is costing us billions in social and economic failure, through the criminal justice system, poor educational outcomes and poor health in adulthood. As the commission argues, government is not yet rising to those challenges with the scale of urgency required. We are spending billions, but so often on sticking plasters and far more than we ever spend on helping vulnerable children avoid harm in the first place through early intervention.

A recent NAO study concludes that government has still not developed a full understanding of the challenges involved in supporting vulnerable adolescents. It argues that the lack of a strategic approach means that government cannot yet say whether its current spending plans will effectively address the needs of families, vulnerable adolescents and children in the most effective way. I know that the Government are trying much more to collaborate across departments to keep better information on programmes and initiatives, but there is still no strategic purpose, goal or assessment of whether vulnerable adolescents' needs are being addressed.

The Commission on Young Lives' final report makes the same case. Too often the report finds systems and services that are not trusted, overstretched and simply unable to meet the needs of many vulnerable children and to stop them falling through the gaps and into danger. Many of our schools are not inclusive, exclusions are not always a last resort, and not every child with SEND gets the help they need to succeed. Added to all this are the impacts of Covid: an increased lack of

readiness for school; speech and language development problems; a rise in child mental health conditions; and increased poverty.

But the commission's final report is a call to action. It acknowledges that the Government have taken some positive steps. For example, the serious violence duty is important. There has also been some progress over the past few years to tackle child criminal exploitation and serious violence, including through the violence reduction units. There is also some funding for improving youth clubs in a "youth promise". It recognises too that committed people and organisations are already making an enormous difference, turning around young people's lives. Often that is through local charities, but too often they are surviving on short-term funding and have no confidence in their ability to survive the financial pressure.

The report proposes a new, joined-up, national programme to protect and support teenagers at risk, as well as their families. It also makes the case for changes that boost the life chances and educational prospects of vulnerable teenagers. At the heart of its recommendations is a call to identify and stick with vulnerable children by building long-term, trusted, culturally sensitive, sustainable and impactful relationships with them and their families. The commission identifies four key areas for reform, as part of a joined-up government plan: the education system, children's social care, family support, and children's mental health services. It does more in calling on the Government really to recognise this as a national threat and for the Prime Minister to take it seriously. There was a serious violence task force under Theresa May, but it never met after she resigned.

The commission argues that the Department for Education should reflect the central importance of thriving children and families as part of delivering a world-class education system and should be responsible for the co-ordination of all issues impacting on vulnerable children across Whitehall. The commission calls for a new Sure Start-plus programme—Sure Start for teenagers—with a network of intervention and support that reduces the risks that vulnerable young people face and encourages them to thrive. The commission calls for a drive to eliminate child poverty and to stop exclusions from school, so that children are not put somewhere where the predators know where they are and know how to find them.

There is lots more which I do not have time to talk about, but I served along with another colleague as part of a parliamentary advisory group to the commission. The recommendations and action plan really would make a difference, if only the Government would take it on. It will need all the engines of government fully behind it. The commission asks a pointed question: why are gangs and criminals so much better than our systems and services at identifying and scooping up vulnerable children? The report also puts forward a plan to turn the tables. I urge the Government to look at it carefully and, importantly, to implement it.

3.55 pm

**Baroness Valentine (CB):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I work part-time for Business in the Community where, as director of place

and levelling up, I aim to facilitate long-term and transformational change in some of the UK's most deprived neighbourhoods. I cannot pretend to be an expert, so will focus my remarks on conversations with a range of experienced individuals who I admire.

First, they all welcome the report, and its focus and interesting proposals. Several remarked that it was good to see a report focusing on funding as well as what needs to be done. They liked the idea of long-term funding sourced from crime and orchestrated by a group of charities. Indeed, Scotland already uses a version of this approach. While they all welcomed the concept behind Sure Start-plus, they flagged two hazards. The first was that it needed to be partnered with reintroducing the original Sure Start to pick up children earlier in their development and throughout. Rashid Bhayat at the Positive Youth Foundation said that problems often start at six or seven; schools are underresourced to deal with them and it is often after years of working with a teenager that Positive Youth Foundation finally builds enough trust to find the root of their trauma.

Many said that more important than new approaches was long-term funding. Programmes and funding that are short term lead to stop-start behaviour and to people being parachuted in who disrupt the local support network and sometimes do more harm than good. The funder Esmée Fairbairn was mentioned as an example of good practice.

The overarching theme was the need for a long-term approach that aligns multiple service provision and is really grounded in the community. It is almost too obvious to need saying but, when dealing with vulnerable teenagers, one needs to build trust, they need to be supported as early as possible in their lives, and we need to stick with them for as long as it takes. Many solutions do not satisfy these criteria. For instance, in many local authorities there is a significant drop in the amount of support available to children in care once they turn 18 and become care leavers. From that point on, the statutory requirement is only that they are seen once every eight weeks by their personal adviser. This is often the most critical period in their development and when support is most needed as, we hope, they enter the world of work or go on to further and higher education.

Conversely, in north Birkenhead, children and family services, health, the youth sector and education are being brought together in the Cradle to Career programme supported by Right to Succeed. Interestingly, because of the siloed nature of these services, at the beginning they cannot even agree on the teenager's address. In Keighley, in Bradford, and a few other wards with high deprivation levels, an Alliance for Life Chances programme is being rolled out to provide a child-centred and seamless service provision from a young age.

I was struck by the strong contribution that the voluntary sector makes. I used to support a charity called Aspired Futures, in Blackpool, which welcomed children who had experienced extensive trauma and began by providing four-on-one support. The children could then continue to visit the centre for as long as they liked, and several ended up as mentors themselves. This approach of alumni mentors is also supported by



[BARONESS VALENTINE]

the Positive Youth Foundation. Sadly, during Covid, Aspired Futures ran out of funding and closed its doors.

The good news is that the staff transferred to Boathouse and the Magic Club, which, although they have a less intensive approach, both do excellent work supporting teenagers. Magic Club points to supporting extracurricular activity, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or art work, as being important for those who do not settle at school. This approach is shared by Element, a social enterprise supporting care leavers. It combines non-judgmental creative courses with a long-term network of support, including opportunities for paid employment. Both organisations comment on the resulting increase in self-confidence.

In the same vein is the support given by businesses to schools and community centres on preparing for work, such as CV writing and interview skills. The Positive Youth Foundation is supported by the local McDonald's franchise, after its owner decided to do something more constructive than tell a load of layabout teenagers to get out. Coventry Building Society spends millions around the country, but in particular has a deep focus on three schools in Foleshill and Longford, a deprived area of Coventry, with measurable improvements in confidence and aspiration. It would say that work experience and placements are invaluable for those whose families are distant from the workplace.

Many commented on the dearth of talent in youth provision. With the closure of youth clubs during austerity and unreliable funding, many have migrated to jobs elsewhere in the sector. This is good for the sector as a whole but, as recommended in the report,

"The recruitment of an army of Youth Practitioners to inspire, support and guide young people in their community"

would be welcome.

It is essential that young people have a voice in the solutions provided for them. For many, grinding poverty is daily life and can be one of the main drivers of exploitation. The trauma they experience, giving rise to what we would call mental health challenges, is their norm. They are remarkably resilient, but we owe it to them to provide hope and aspiration.

Lastly, I have a question for the Minister about NEETs. I am unclear where responsibility for NEETs now sits within government. I am aware that it has, at times, sat with opportunity areas and the DfE, and at others with levelling up. Please will the Minister clarify which department now has responsibility for them?

4.02 pm

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, as a young teacher in Tullibody, in Clackmannanshire, in the 1980s, I had a bit of a reputation for being tough in the classroom, only because I wanted to make sure that the kids from the deprived communities locally had the same chances as the kids at the perceived to be much better school down the road. One of my big things was to make sure that the kids would do their homework; I would pursue them relentlessly to make sure that they brought it in on time.

One year, there were two girls in a class who consistently did not manage to meet the homework target. One day in the class, when I was being particularly heavy with them about this failure, they broke down into tears, and I asked them to wait behind afterwards in the classroom. It became clear in the discussion I had with them that the reason they could not do their homework was not that they did not want to do it, and not that they were not enjoying the subject or did not want to make things better for themselves, but that the children's home they lived in in the local town was absolutely chaotic. Not only was there no table or place for them to do their homework or study at night but the noise and chaos in the environment meant that, even if there had been a table, it would not have been possible. I resolved that day to work to try to change that situation in any elected or public position that I held.

I partly kept that going, when, at the same time, in Stirling, as a local councillor, I came across a group of young break-dancers. There had been complaints from the local community in St Ninians that the local boys were causing so much trouble and noise that it was really disruptive to the community and the police or somebody had to do something about it. It became obvious in talking to the community, and then to the boys, that the core of this was about an area where the boys would start break-dancing, which would then break out into trouble in the local area.

They wanted to dance. At the council we hired a guy called Royston Maldoom who was a community contemporary dance consultant. He set up a group called Stirling Youth Dance. Some of these boys went on to practice professionally; one of them trained at the Ballet Rambert in Paris. These were boys who just needed an opportunity and a channel through which to seize that opportunity. In one year, in Stirling back in the 1980s, I saw on one side the despair of failure for kids who were looking for hope; and, on the other side, hope for kids who were staring failure in the face. That is one of the reasons why I absolutely welcome and congratulate my noble friend Lady Armstrong on securing this debate this afternoon and congratulate the remarkable Anne Longfield and her team for this outstanding report.

I should declare a number of interests in the register and elsewhere. I am an ambassador for Action for Children, a vice-president of UNICEF UK, a trustee of a mentoring charity, MCR Pathways, I was a member of the same Parliamentary advisory group as my noble friend Lady Armstrong on this report, my own foundation, the McConnell International Foundation, is active in this field and I am a patron of the Diana Award. There are so many great organisations working in this field, and they work not just in one country but across the UK, so although this report refers specifically to England, I want to make my remarks in the context of what I think should become a more united and comprehensive effort across the whole of the UK.

There were issues that were the core of my work as Education Minister and First Minister that I have always felt needed a long-term perspective and consistency to make a difference. One issue was knife crime, and we have debated in this Chamber before the work of

the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit in Glasgow, which had cross-party support and survived all the political ups and downs in Scotland over the years to be a big success because it was a long-term project. Another was child protection reform. A number of children had died through neglect back around 2000, and child protection changes that were made then, again with cross-party support, were sustained over a long period and have made a real difference in Scotland on that front too.

However, I think that over the years we have failed to do this with looked-after children and vulnerable teenagers. It is partly because all the initiatives, the policies and the funding for looked-after children and vulnerable teenagers are subject to the whim of individual Ministers, and they change and move around, and they go up and down as a result of changes in Governments and leaders. In my view that is the key thing that we have to stop, and I welcome the fact that this report calls for consistency.

The situation facing these teenagers should shame all of us in public life and all of us in the professions that serve them, as I was once. The kids in the care of the state in this country have the worst outcomes. In many cases, they have the worst expectations. They certainly have the worst experiences and, ultimately, they have the worst lives. In the 21st century, the lack of consistent, cross-party focus, policy and priority for these kids has gone on for far too long. Sadly, these kids with chaotic lives face chaotic services and chaotic support. They fall into a spiral of neglect and abuse. There is a lack of support for special needs. They also face condemnation rather than second chances. They damage themselves, they damage our society and they go on to damage their own kids as well. It goes on from generation to generation. Some of them fall into aggression. They perhaps choose the perceived safety of gang to help them survive. Some of them simply fail in education or to find fulfilling work, they fail to find a stable family which they can head in the future and they certainly fail to be happy and, sadly, some of them take their own lives. We should take this seriously.

Anne Longfield is a remarkable individual. Her voice on behalf of these kids is powerful, relentless and consistent, and her commission has done a remarkable job in producing this report. I will briefly highlight three of its recommendations. The first is opening schools—and other buildings, I would add—outside school hours and during school holidays. As chair of the charity Cash for Kids in Scotland, I saw the benefits in turning our funding programme for vulnerable kids in the west of Scotland away from taking place just at Christmas each year to supporting them in school holiday periods and the difference that that made on the streets of Glasgow and other towns and cities in the west of Scotland. Providing for kids outside the school environment is just as important as providing for them inside it.

The proposal for massive investment in mental health programming is all the more acutely needed after the disaster of the past three years and the way in which children's needs were ignored, with school closures and a lack of support during the Covid pandemic. That situation was particularly bad in Scotland; it was even worse than it was in England. I would include in

the idea of an army of youth practitioners not just professionals and charity workers but volunteer mentors working with these youngsters and helping them through that difficult teenage transition. Teenagers in the most comfortable homes, with the best chances in life and the most resources find that transition difficult, so it is no wonder that teenagers who live these chaotic lives find it particularly difficult. We also need a genuine partnership, with children coming first and education for all.

I urge not just the Government but all the political parties in the UK—in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—to unite and adopt these recommendations and I urge leaders to work together across the UK and inside the individual nations and local regions of these countries and to use what my old boss, our headteacher back in that school in the 1980s, used to call “stickability” for the kids. The key thing he wanted them to have was stickability; he thought that was the thing that would give them a chance. The thing that might give them a real chance is if leaders, politicians and public agencies have stickability, so let us practice what we preach. I think that a 20-year strategy, passing over more than a generation, with consistency, education and parenting at its core would help to provide and support fulfilling lives and a better life for all.

One of the reasons these kids are left behind is that they do not have a voice. Nobody speaks for them; they cannot speak for themselves. They know what they want to say and what they need, but they are not heard. It is vital that we find a way of embedding in the system the changes that are required so that, even without that voice, they are still heard and supported. I suggest that rather than a triple lock on pensions for those of us who are nearing that age—there are many in the Chamber who might already be over that age—why do we not have a triple lock for vulnerable teenagers? Why do we not say that we will make sure that each of them will finish their education, that each of them will have a mentor to help them through those difficult teenage years and that we will not only invest in them as children but invest in that transition from childhood to adulthood, which is difficult for everybody and almost impossible for them?

4.13 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Durham:** My Lords, it is a real pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord McConnell; I associate myself with everything he said, particularly about adopting the recommendations. He also reminded us that this is no new problem. He talked about his experience in the 1980s; I could do the same from when I was doing youth work. You can also quote Greek writers and philosophers about the problems of young people in the era of the Greeks, so this is something we have always lived with.

I also thank the noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong, for securing this debate. It is always lovely to share something with someone else from this part of the north-east of England. I congratulate Anne Longfield on the report, *Hidden in Plain Sight*. As the Commission on Young Lives' report demonstrates, young people falling vulnerable to violence and exploitation and entering the criminal justice system is not an issue that is shrinking, nor one that could possibly be ignored.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM]

The effects of this problem are widespread, impacting not only the lives and futures of the young people themselves but the prosperity and security of our whole country. Such an issue cannot be resolved through sticking plasters or short-term solutions; it is instead vital that we examine and address the root causes and respond with long-term solutions.

As the report states,

“it is impossible to overestimate how important poverty is as a driver for so many of the social problems ruining and holding back lives.”

Almost 70% of young people receiving custodial sentences have received free school meals at some point, illustrating the connection between those in the criminal justice system and poverty. It is therefore essential that reducing and eliminating child poverty is made one of the priorities. Today, there are approximately 4 million children living in poverty in the UK, and only this week, a report published by the Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group revealed that child poverty in the north-east of England is now the highest it has been since 2000-01.

These statistics are staggering, but we must remember that behind these statistics are individual young lives, each with worth and potential. Will the Government look at the recommendations of the reports—both the *Young Lives* report and the Child of the North report—to reduce child poverty and consequently address this significant cause of young people falling into violence and exploitation, through abolishing the two-child benefit limit, extending free school meals to all families receiving universal credit, and making eliminating child poverty a priority in their levelling-up agenda, as the noble Baronesses, Lady Lister, Lady Stroud, and myself are proposing in an amendment to the levelling-up Bill?

In addition to child poverty, reforms to our education system must be made. It was horrible to read that still almost one in five children leaves school with no GCSEs. That is almost one in five children leaving school with no basic qualification, limiting their future opportunities. We must take urgent action to change this, and I believe that this has to start with a change in the curriculum. Having a curriculum that not only provides children with essential knowledge and skills but is also interesting, fulfilling and applicable to those who learn it should be a priority. Literacy and numeracy are utterly essential, but too many young people see them as utterly irrelevant because they do not see the connection with their lives and their skills. We need to change the curriculum to be child focused, so that, in exploring their gifts and their skills, they come to realise why it matters to be literate and why numeracy matters.

I have two very quick stories. Very recently, I met a man now in his 60s who left school with no qualifications and who became the lead adviser on the environment to the last Labour Government. His words to me were, “School was utterly irrelevant. It was only when I could link it with the values of wanting to serve the world better that I realised learning mattered”. The other story is from a recent presentation to the Youth Futures Foundation from a young man in his 20s who came out with no qualifications. He said, “Thankfully,

someone recognised that I had skills in building relationships with people, bringing about reconciliation with people who could not get on with each other. They saw that I had done that in school. I got no qualifications, but they recognised my skills and my gifts and said, ‘We’ll work with you on those’”. In his early 20s, he is now a significant supplier of mentoring and support to other young people, because someone realised what education was appropriate for him.

Furthermore, the exclusion culture existing in schools throughout our country, as highlighted by the report, must come to an end. The fact that 59% of children who have been permanently excluded had also been cautioned or sentenced for an offence demonstrates how exclusion can push children towards harm and exploitation, and indicates the need to keep children in education. Exclusion provokes feelings of being cast aside, of being forgotten, and of being unimportant. If children do not feel valued, how will they ever see their own value that they can bring to society? Here we have to note the dreadful statistics that show that those with autism and special educational needs, and those from ethnic-minority backgrounds—particularly young black males—are being disproportionately excluded. That has to be tackled.

Of course, children must learn that we must all face the consequences of our actions, but, whether it be in the context of school exclusions or the criminal justice system, our society is often too quick to forget that they are children who have the rest of their lives ahead of them—lives that each have value, worth and potential. We need to reform our systems to prioritise supporting young people, not punishing them. We must prioritise guidance, investment and education, so that no young person in this country falls vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

Often, this is done best by locally based organisations. I would like to name some specific ones that I have links with. They are not formal links; these are just organisations that I have had the privilege of spending time with and that are utterly wonderful. Spark2Life is based in Walthamstow but now offers services in many places. Power the Fight is led by Ben Lindsay, who was given an award in the New Year Honours List for his work. There is First Class Foundation in Birmingham. Then, there are national ones such as the Children’s Society. The learning from their work is what needs to shape future policy. Will the Minister agree to meet me and some of the leaders of these locally based organisations to explore these matters further?

I want to comment on the Sure Start-plus proposals. This needs to be linked with the rollout of family hubs, which are meant to cover the whole of childhood. Having two systems would, I think, be unhelpful. So, rather than having a separate scheme, we need to link the proposals around Sure Start-plus in this report with the proper development of family hubs, and work with the charity and voluntary sectors on delivery. You cannot deliver some of what this report suggests in exactly the same location, but you can do so from the same hub using a hub-and-spoke model.

I will end with some theology, if I may; I say, “If I may”, but noble Lords are not going to be able to shut me up. Every child is a gift. They are a gift from God



to their parents, to their wider family and to society as a whole. They are to be welcomed as one made in God's image and loved by God, as seen in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself welcomed children. He treated them as of great worth and noted that they teach adults things about God's ways that adults miss or forget. He gave a grave warning to those who damage and harm children. Our response must always be that young lives are precious and valuable. They are to be nurtured for their own sake, not simply for what each person might become in future. They are not economic contributors of the future; they are people of value in their own right now. However, what they might become does have to be held high, because we want them to be the very best human beings that they can be. We want them to reach their full potential and be gifts for the good of all and society as a whole. The heart of this will be to love them and thus nurture them. When young people know they are loved, they really flourish.

4.23 pm

**Baroness Blower (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate. I absolutely congratulate my noble friend Lady Armstrong both on securing this debate and on her opening speech. Indeed, I also congratulate my noble friend Lord McConnell, who has many brilliant anecdotes from having been a teacher; that is one of the great things about having been a teacher.

I will focus on the issues to do with schools. I absolutely applaud the recommendation that schools should be a whole-community asset. When I began teaching in 1973 in London, this was much more the case than it is now. A combination of the fragmentation of the governance structures in schools and the dreaded PFI has made school buildings, including all their resources and facilities, much less available to communities. This should be remedied. Although I acknowledge what the right reverend Prelate has just said, and the Sure Start-plus hubs do seem an attractive way of doing this, critical to this is sufficient funding to ensure the maintenance of buildings, the additional workforce necessary to provide the programmes, and youth practitioners trained and qualified to build back better the youth services that we have lost over the last decade. That seems to be a very good way forward.

Turning to the culture of inclusion recommended in the report, in my own career I worked in a team at local authority level, one of the specific objectives of which was to prevent primary exclusion. It was a successful team. However, much of that expertise has been lost over time due to education cuts. Now, as many children continue to face much harder lives and have unrecognised and unaddressed social and emotional needs, we need those additional people in schools more than ever. Even primary-age children have mental health difficulties. Teachers, who now are often trained just in one school, without the advantage of learning about child development, do not necessarily have the skills and competences to identify, much less diagnose, the difficulties with which young children present.

Yesterday, in the APPG on psychology, there was a discussion, which included the voices of young people, about the lack of support for children with anxiety and all manner of other problems that need to be addressed.

In my experience, schools sometimes feel that the only way to seek help for a child or young person whose needs are not being met in the school is to exclude them in the hope that the local authority will pick them up and provide something better. I believe that they are wrong. However, I understand how hard it is for teachers, confronted sometimes with a multiplicity of difficulties, to find a way forward in the absence of appropriate services being available and accessible to every child. So a new transitional fund to reduce and eliminate exclusion, as recommended in the report, is essential.

There is much good work being done in schools to address mental health issues and other psychological problems. I know from the APPG yesterday and from teachers that an educational charity, Place2Be, does excellent work supporting children and young people in schools through its resources and mental health workers. However, we have close to 25,000 schools, and Place2Be and other charities simply do not work in enough of them. Place2Be works in 500 schools. So there are lots of gaps. As we heard throughout Covid, vulnerable children were even more at risk, as were children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, who will now be facing even greater pressure, given the cost of living crisis.

I firmly believe that it is an appropriate aspiration to eliminate exclusion from primary schools, but it requires resources. Similarly, we can address the current level of exclusion from secondary schools, particularly the racialised aspect. But, again, it requires planning and resources. We recruit too few teachers in total at present, as government statistics show. We particularly fail to attract enough black and minority-ethnic students into teaching. We must have a teaching force that can represent the breadth of our communities, as is recommended in this report.

We also need an anti-racist education, as well as a national, local and school-level laser-like focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. But what we do not need, I am sorry to say, is to further extend the remit of Ofsted, whose reputation is tarnished among teachers, head teachers and very many parents. The exposé this week of the utter and abject failure of Ofsted in the case of the Doncaster school and children's home—for which Amanda Spielman, the head of Ofsted, has not apologised anything like enough, in my view—should give us pause for thought, after which we should seek a root and branch reform of the way in which the inspection of schools operates.

There are now many voices—including that of the right reverend Prelate—calling for significant reform of both the current curriculum and assessment, evidencing that much about them is causing stress and disaffection. There are many international examples of how schooling can work better than what we are doing here at the moment.

In conclusion, I obviously welcome the report and almost all of the recommendations, which for the most part chime with positions taken by my own union, the NEU. It has an excellent document, *Preventing and Reducing Exclusions*, which opens with the sentence:

"Exclusions, and who is excluded, tell a story about the inequalities in our education system."

We want and need to tell a different story.

[BARONESS BLOWER]

Finally, the NEU has done research on belonging in schools: why it matters and what it looks like. It concluded that, where school leaders, the teams around them and all the teachers develop an intentional approach to look beyond sanctions-driven approaches in lessons and to work on social and emotional learning and student well-being, the experience of students themselves is enhanced—and frankly, so is the experience of teachers, and it is much more likely to lead to the retention of teachers. Schools will improve and, with the addition of the wonderful range of opportunities beyond the school day talked about in this report, so will the lives of all of our young people. It is urgent that the Government respond positively to this well-researched and costed report.

4.32 pm

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab):** My Lords, I join with previous speakers in expressing my gratitude to my noble friend Lady Armstrong of Hill Top for initiating this timely debate on an important subject, and also, serendipitously, securing time for us to develop our arguments adequately. Too often we have three-minute speeches; the 12-minute speeches that we have had so far have illustrated the importance of giving people time to talk and develop their ideas.

Now, there is no doubt, given the strength of the report, that the Government need to respond positively to its recommendations. I look forward to the response from the Minister, and I hope that we are not too disappointed. I support strongly the approach of the commission, and its specific recommendations. There is one point that I think could be developed, which I will come to in a moment, but I trust that that is not in any way taken to suggest a lack of support for the measures it proposes. Other speakers have highlighted particular issues; the background to many of the problems we face is poverty, and I am glad to see the report's recommendation 4:

“Help young people and their families out of poverty”—  
as was stressed by the right reverend Prelate.

To mention another, more specific issue, I very much agreed with the contribution of my noble friend Lady Blower on school exclusions. I support the recommendation in the report for the Government to promote a new era of inclusive education, ending the culture of exclusion and helping all children to succeed in their education. I hope therefore that we get a positive response from the Government to the call for a new era of inclusive education. It has to be acknowledged that it comes with a cost: it is not cost-free, it is not a change of attitudes, it is actually putting the resources in to enable schools to deal with all their children.

The main issue I want to address is the mental health of children, of young children in particular. The report is subtitled:

“A national plan of action to support vulnerable teenagers to succeed and to protect them from adversity, exploitation, and harm”,

so, reasonably, it focuses explicitly and implicitly on teenagers and what happens in secondary schools. But the simple point I wish to make is that it is so much better for the individual children concerned, the education system and society in general to help children who are

at risk of problems with their mental health in primary schools. It is an unfortunate truth that too often it is too late or, at best, much harder to resolve problems by the time children have become teenagers. The report points out:

“The transition to secondary school can often escalate difficulties and be a trigger to greater risks”,

but this acknowledges that the problems are already there. They should be addressed at that age and not left to escalate.

The report's findings demonstrate the need for a collaborative approach to children's mental health services between schools, health services, local authorities and the police. In addition to this interorganisational approach for at-risk children, we need legislation to make access to early intervention for children and young people a statutory requirement. By providing early intervention and support when young children show signs of mental distress, or children are at risk, we can not only help break the cycles of exploitation and suffering for individuals but reduce the overall impact—indeed, the cost—to the economy.

I am sure I do not need to spend much time making the case for more action on improving mental health. More than £2 billion is spent annually on social care for people with mental health problems, with the wider cost being estimated at over £118 billion across the UK through lost productivity and informal care costs. As the report explains, mental health problems also add considerably to the workloads of our education, criminal and justice systems.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that half of lifetime mental health problems start before the age of 14. It is therefore unfortunate that spending by local authorities on early intervention services for children and young people was cut by half between 2010 and 2020, when it is a growing problem. The *Good Childhood Report 2022* shows that

“children's happiness continues to decline. Young people are on average less happy with their life ... than ten years ago.”

That is from the Children's Society. NHS figures show that more than 700,000 children and young people were in contact with mental health services in the 2021-22 financial year, compared with a little over half of that only four years ago. The number of referrals to child and adolescent mental health services—CAMHS—has more than doubled since 2019, with resulting long waiting lists and, unfortunately, one in five referrals being turned away with no signposting to alternative sources of support.

The outcome of all this is that seven out of 10 children who experience mental health problems do not receive appropriate help early enough. Alarming, we are told that there is an average 10-year delay between young people first experiencing their symptoms and receiving the help they need.

It is unfortunate that the Government do not appear to understand the scale of the crisis. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care was asked recently about plans to bring forward legislative proposals on early intervention measures to help safeguard the mental health and well-being of young people. The response was that there are no plans to do so.

There must be concern that currently there are no statutory measures in place to guarantee essential early intervention for children and young people who are developing mental health problems. The forthcoming mental health Bill will be an opportunity to change this, but so far the draft Bill focuses almost exclusively on crisis intervention.

Rather than developing strategies for early intervention, we have gone backwards over the past decade. Expenditure on late intervention increased over the 10 years from 2010 to 2020, from £5.7 billion to £8 billion. But how much of that increase was because expenditure on early intervention more than halved, from £3.8 billion to only £1.8 billion?

A 2014 report by the LSE and Rethink Mental Illness found that early intervention could equal a net saving of almost £8,000 per person over four years. Over a 10-year period, £15 in costs could be saved for every £1 invested in early intervention. There is therefore overwhelming evidence that early intervention is effective for society and for the individual and produces the greatest impact, leading to happier, more productive and more fulfilled lives. When we come to teenagers, the subject of this report, early intervention means when they are of primary school age.

It is so distressing how often we hear now of extremely dangerous and harmful behaviours exhibited by teenagers as young as 13 or 14, who mere months before were children and who had perhaps already been moved out of mainstream education and were already known to local police. The report describes excellently how the younger children in these communities are

“starting to follow the group around and mimic their behaviour.”

It is more important than ever that we have a workforce delivering professional psychological support to these groups earlier, when they are children. They should get the care they need when they first exhibit risky behaviour or first start mimicking older children in their communities who are behaving dangerously.

To conclude, I hope that we can continue to push for expert mental health support before the teenage years to be taken seriously as a preventive measure, instead of allowing issues to escalate and entrench, casting long shadows from childhood into young adulthood.

4.42 pm

**Lord Sentamu (CB):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong, on securing this debate. I associate myself with all the wonderful, powerful speeches that your Lordships have made.

On New Year’s Day 2003, Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespeare were shot dead by members of a gang. A huge rally at Aston Villa’s football ground was called. They cried out, “Enough is enough. Not another drop of blood.” Out of that rally a movement was born in Birmingham: Bringing Hope. Reverend Carver Anderson, the pastor, and many members of the movement have done sterling work. As its former patron, I commend its work. It has many lessons to teach us about the changes and educational prospects of teenagers whose lives are at risk.

Let us put into action the recommendations of the *Hidden in Plain Sight* report. Children are not our future leaders, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham said; they are our leaders today. May we listen to them and welcome them.

4.44 pm

**Lord Addington (LD):** My Lords, this is one of those debates—and I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong for tabling it—where, as you listen to it, you think, “Yep, we’ve been here before. We’ve done this before and heard it before.” What you have not heard is the current context. County lines and the emphasis on knife crime are the new twist. Anyone surprised that gangs are full of 14 year-olds has not been paying attention. If you go into any prison, you will find that the scholars are the ones who stayed in the education system until the age of 14; most were out of the system way before that. That has been a depressing fact for a long time.

I do not think there is anything radical in the report, but bringing it all together is the important point. A tick-box culture of support—saying, “Yes, we’ve done this”, “Is this the job of the education sector or should it be somewhere else?” or “Which bit of the education sector system has done what at what time?”—leads to the discovery that the person we excluded from school has decided they do not like the alternative provision at the pupil referral unit and has disappeared, and now our criminals have realised that that person is an excellent delivery system for narcotics. That is not too far off the Artful Dodger, for God’s sake.

We have to try to have a more coherent attitude to this issue. We as the political class have to say that the current Government seem to have acknowledged that the problem is there and are moving away from “Let’s be tough”. Every time that anyone in any department says, “We’re going to be tough and do something about this”, I get a cold shudder down my back because they usually then create a new problem. If you send people to prison, as the current Government have realised, either you end up having several bouts of offending before they come get of it, usually because they are getting too old and it tends to be a younger person’s game, or they stay in because they have committed more serious offences. Unless we can start to break that cycle by having a more coherent attitude across the piece, we are going to continue having the same problems.

I do not know if society is incapable of removing the problem altogether but we can certainly reduce it. There are a variety of actions that have been identified that help here. By supporting and helping voluntary organisations and activities—youth clubs and so on—the state can create the right environment. I must declare one of my little interests here: sport is the ultimate voluntary activity. When someone starts participating in a particular sport, they join a tribe, not a gang, which will embrace them with its own ways and bizarre rituals. I must declare that I am a Rugby Union player, but all sports have that element.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab):** We all have our problems.



**Lord Addington (LD):** True enough. The parliamentary team is playing again soon so the physiotherapist may well benefit.

These are groups that thrive on activity. Dance, music and so on all have a variation on this. When it comes to support—I have said this before so I might as well do so again—Governments here are very lucky because most sports clubs have a tradition of not being that involved with the state. We tend to do it ourselves, unlike in France where you would play at the stade municipal, or in Germany where, as I have said many times, when the FA says to its German colleagues, “How much do you spend on supporting pitches?”, the response is, “Oh, we don’t do that; it’s a local government job.”

As we got there first, sporting structures in Great Britain tend to have acquired grounds, status and the ability to maintain themselves, but I hope we will hear something in the near future about how the Government will support these structures because all sports have a problem with retention. They need to get people to play not just as children but as adults because there is always a problem with that: people tell me, “We have lots of children joining”, and I say, “Great, but unless you get them to play as adults then you have no coaches, no long-term interaction and no investment back into society.” I hope that the Minister will let us know what the Government’s strategy is for maintaining these ultimately volunteer groups.

The same strategy that works for them, by the way, will also be very helpful to all the other creative things—arts and drama, et cetera. If the Minister were prepared to tell us how they are prepared to do something really useful, such as teaching somebody how to be a treasurer or secretary of a voluntary group, they would help all these groups and every small branch of a charity. That is the last of my little rant on that subject.

There are the educational problems. The noble Baroness must have been expecting this, but how are we going to spot those who are failing earlier and intervene better? We have heard about the special educational needs review, which we have been expecting since September. We will now not have it in January, which was the last thing we heard, but “early in this year”. I have got a fiver on March. I do not know whether I will win that bet—I am quite prepared to lose it, if we have it slightly earlier—but we have been waiting a long time. The 20% failure rate to achieve anything really measurable at school is not a surprise. It is also a consistent figure. The social factor or the fact that these people do not find acquiring knowledge that easy must be the consistent things here.

As president of the British Dyslexia Association—I am dyslexic myself—I say that some people cannot learn to do something that most people, let us face it, pick up comparatively easily. You can argue about what the best system is for reading, which the support system is best for reading, learning et cetera. Most people pick that up fairly easily and we have designed the systems to be fairly easy to pick up, which is why we use them. If you are not doing that, you need other interventions. These problems are combined with poverty and the lack of support because when it comes to special educational needs, guess what? The people

who get the help are those who have the type of parents who go out there and drag it out of the system. Once again, I must declare an interest as having had, shall we say, one of those behind me.

Unless we get a better idea of how early you should intervene to identify and support somebody, that person, while in the school system—that huge, dominant chunk of your early life—will be told they are failing. It is quite a logical process to remove yourself from something you are failing at and get out of it. It might even be a sign of intelligence to get out of there, so I hope the Minister will give us some more hints about how this review is going to take place or at least some assurances about the amount of effort that will go behind it because that 20% failure rate will still be there.

Another interest of mine is that everybody’s standard computer will read a document to you. It also has a software package so that you can talk to it and it will write for you. Every one of your Lordships has that: every mobile phone has it as well. How are we working that into the system? How are we helping someone to get through if they have trouble sitting down and studying in the classroom? How are we identifying the person who does not? The male of the species is the bigger offender here. Girls in classrooms tend to try to hide and disappear; boys kick off and get excluded. That rule of thumb is one reason why we did not identify as many girls as boys in the past. We all thought there was an imbalance between the two in frequency; we are now discovering that they are much more even.

I hope that the Minister will comment on consistency of approach and that the noble Baroness, Lady Chapman, will talk on behalf of a group who regard themselves, shall we say, as the Government in waiting. If I were looking at the polls, I would think that it would not be an unreasonable expectation—though it ain’t over yet, as we all know—so, between the two of them, perhaps they could say what consistencies they would take from each other. It is about getting some consistency in these approaches. Wonderful schemes do not often work if it is about being tough, or being new or different. Usually, it is about a consensus of approach being maintained over a few years so that we stand a chance of making a real impression on these problems.

As I said, this may be a new manifestation of them, but all the problems are consistent. We have heard all these things before about ethnic diversity and how certain groups are not being reached for cultural reasons. We need some form of consistency because otherwise we will be back here in a decade having the same sort of debate again with the same sort of report—but having a slightly new thing to latch it on to, which the papers have been telling us is the end of society. It is not. It is just another group of people with their lives ruined.

4.55 pm

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Addington. I really enjoyed his speech. He made some very important points and I think—if I can interpret it this way—almost threw down the gauntlet. It is one that I would be only too willing to reach for.

I also commend my noble friend Lady Armstrong not just for securing this important debate but for her leadership on this issue over many years. I hope she knows that she has been an inspiration to me and many others, particularly in the north-east but not only there. The way that she champions these issues, and has done so consistently when they have been in and out of fashion over the years, is the reason we respect her so much. I am going to stop because she is probably blushing—or I am going to.

I also echo her thanks to Anne Longfield for this report. The findings are utterly damning. To draw out a couple of things, 80% of kids who get a custodial sentence have had special educational needs at some point and presumably many opportunities to intervene were missed. Almost 70% of these young people have received free school meals as well. This is not new, as many speakers have said, but things have got worse. Young people are being attacked, knifed, killed and involved in serious crime. There is a glamorising of gang activities, grooming, coercion. Very vulnerable young people are being exploited by criminals and are not in touch with the services that ought to be there to see them. They are too often invisible.

My noble friend Lord Davies of Brixton made a very powerful point about intervening early. It is one that we are familiar with, and I have heard it many times in this Chamber in the short number of years I have been here. He called for a collaborative approach. His call for legislation to support this is a wise one, which we should consider further and develop if we want that long-lasting impact.

Looked-after children are currently being failed. It is worse now than ever. We need a holistic joined-up approach even to begin to have an impact on the challenges that they face.

The plea of the noble Lord, Lord Addington, for support for sports clubs is worth heeding. I was struck too by the account of the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, of how much the voluntary sector can bring to this agenda. I echo completely—I could not support it more—what my noble friend Lady Blower said about Place2Be. It is doing remarkable work in the schools where it is present.

The private sector can play a vital role too in providing work opportunities, encouraging their workforces to volunteer and providing some services. However, as Josh MacAlister was quite right to point out in *The Independent Review of Children's Social Care* that those children's care must be only in the child's interests and never in the interests of shareholders. I would appreciate an update from the Minister on whether the Government are doing any work on that. We have debated it before, and I will not go into it all again today. Some of the provision is not as it should be for those most vulnerable children and the Minister knows this so I will not hammer it home yet again.

My noble friend Lord McConnell's account of a community coming together to inspire and divert young people from crime was instructive. I observe, as he did, that the magic that these kids need is not available consistently across the country. The local leadership he described is now strained beyond purpose, and the

services are too often unable to cope even with their core functions, never mind leading the innovation and creativity that we need to see in every community.

Young people are still suffering while being housed in unregulated settings. So when will the Minister finally end the utter scandal of children being abandoned in unregulated placements? This challenge is way too big for the Department for Education; it needs a cross-government partnership approach. My noble friend Lord McConnell used a really good word that we should think about: "stickability". I know exactly what he means—I think we all do—and it is the right word to apply to this issue. To answer the challenge of the noble Lord, Lord Addington, if the Government took this approach, we on these Benches would not just support the Government but champion it, help to embed it and deliver it in government. I do not know what more I can say by way of encouragement and support for action from the position of Opposition.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham spoke specifically about children in the north-east, and so he should, not just because that is where he is based but because child poverty rates have risen to the highest level for over 20 years there. This is not the legacy of the last Labour Government; this is all about political choices. If we are not here to tackle these issues, what on earth are we doing? I know that we are not particularly party political in this House, but the situation we face today, especially in the north-east, is a direct consequence of decisions made by the Government since 2010. The only way we will have any chance of addressing this is if we make different decisions and choices.

Anne Longfield's *Hidden in Plain Sight* takes a thoroughly deep dive—that is the beauty of it—into the experience of children with special educational needs and that of their parents, laying down the gauntlet to the Government with several proposals. Yet it too often feels like the Government have nothing of substance to say. The SEND review consultation response is perpetually delayed, and these children are being constantly let down during this delay. When can we and these children across the country finally expect the response?

The report also recommends that

"The Government leads a national mission"—

missions are very fashionable right now; I get what they are, so this is not a bad description and it works for me—

"to identify and remove racial bias in the systems that are currently failing"

too many black and minority ethnic children, which is so starkly evidenced in the report's findings. The Minister probably knows that we on these Benches have already committed to bringing forward specific race equality legislation to tackle this issue. Do the Government intend to do anything similar, even on just this narrow point in the report?

The failure to act early to prevent children and young people falling through the cracks is utterly devastating for the families concerned—of course it is—but, more widely, it exhausts communities. It is a waste of talent and potential, and the institutional safety net, the job of which has always been to help, has worn far

[BARONESS CHAPMAN OF DARLINGTON]

too thin: youth services are gone and there is a hollowing out of local government and a lack of strategy. Police are inappropriately getting involved when they are not the best service to be in contact with young people, and schools are fragmented and unaccountable to their communities and to one another. Sure Start is decimated beyond recognition, and the skills and experience that have been lost from that workforce is shattering to think about.

We do not need just another initiative; there has been “initiative-itis” on this agenda, none of which has had an impact. What is really needed, as so many speakers have said, is a long-term strategy devised, ideally, alongside practitioners and service users—and we need it soon. I do not expect the Minister to be able to commit to that this afternoon, but would she at least accept the point we are making again and again, today and in earlier debates, that it is the Government’s job to lead on this and to act?

5.06 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, I too express my thanks—and, although I do not come from the north-east, I join the north-east admiration and respect club—to the noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong of Hill Top, for securing the debate and for her knowledgeable and insightful comments, and to Anne Longfield and her team for the work they have done on the Commission on Young Lives.

Tackling challenges such as criminal exploitation, gangs and serious violence underpins the Government’s commitment to improve the educational prospects and life chances of vulnerable teenagers. Today, I will highlight the ongoing work and planned reforms the Government are undertaking to address some of the challenges rightly identified in the report. I hope that the noble Baroness, Lady Chapman, will find that I have something substantive to say, not just today but, as she knows, when we publish our response to *The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care*—including the national panel reviews of the terrible murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and the CMA report into children’s homes—and our response to the consultation for children with special educational needs and alternative provision. I will also try to paint a slightly different and, I hope, less bleak picture, without in any way diminishing the problems that your Lordships have highlighted. I can absolutely reassure the noble Baroness that all our policy is made in consultation with practitioners, with those with experience of using services and with those who have experienced some of the issues raised in the report but perhaps have not had access to services.

I would also like to respond to the challenge from the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sentamu, about keeping children front and centre. That is what we are all striving to do, not just those in central government but those working throughout local government, our schools, the voluntary sector and beyond.

The report talks about the importance of recognising serious violence and criminal exploitation as a national threat. Tackling serious violence is an important priority for the Government. To help prevent criminal exploitation

of vulnerable children, we have focused on early intervention—something I heard about from many noble Lords—to steer young people away from crime, investing £64 million in violence reduction units, £300 million in the Youth Endowment Fund and a further £5 million through our county lines programme. I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong, acknowledged this, but she talked about a lack of co-ordination. The Government absolutely recognise the need for co-ordination; we believe that the violence reduction units and the Grip hotspot policing programme—only the police can give names like that—have prevented an estimated 49,000 violent offences in the first two years of their activity.

In addition to tough enforcement to get dangerous weapons off the street, in education specifically we have announced a £45 million investment in funding specialist support in areas where serious violence most impacts on the lives of young people. This will enable professionals, including mental health therapists and family workers, to provide support to vulnerable children in alternative provision schools. In mainstream schools, the SAFE taskforces are investing in support such as mentoring to improve attendance and behaviour. Your Lordships talked a lot about exclusions, and I shall address some of those remarks; we know that school is an incredibly important protective factor for children, which is why attendance is so critical and we are so focused on it for all children.

The report talks about reforming the youth justice system to move towards a welfare-based, trauma-informed, child-first approach. In addition to our focus on prevention, where young people end up entering the youth justice system, we ensure that the welfare of those offenders is not overlooked. Much of the work of the justice system’s arm’s-length bodies is trauma-informed and child-focused. The Youth Justice Board, which has oversight of local youth offending teams, has adopted a child-first approach.

I absolutely echo the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, on the importance of the work of charities in this space. I could be a little biased, having been involved with a few in a former life. I absolutely recognise Esmée Fairbairn and other funders who really provide incredibly valuable, flexible and long-term support to the sector. I also echo the recognition of the work of Place2Be, which I know well. In response to the invitation from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham to meet some of the charities he works with, I would be delighted to—but I would also be delighted to liaise with colleagues in DCMS. I just want to be sure that they meet the right Minister. I am happy to work with him on that.

The Government are committed to supporting the delivery of the most effective and holistic care to these especially vulnerable children, wherever they are in the system, to give them the best chance to get on in life, while of course protecting communities and reducing reoffending. That is why we are investing £36.5 million in a pilot of a new form of youth custody, which is secure schools. The aim is that it will be a school first, with security, rather than a prison first, with education, and take a trauma-informed approach to rehabilitating children who offend. The Oasis Charitable Trust will run the first secure school in Medway.



The noble Baroness, Lady Chapman, addressed some of the issues around racial bias and race equity. I know that the noble Baroness talked about it in a broader sense. The Government are very sensitive to this, whether it is in the criminal justice system or our mental health services. We are absolutely clear that everyone within the criminal justice system in particular should be treated equally, regardless of their ethnicity or race, which is why we have safeguards in place. As the *Inclusive Britain* report set out in March 2022, we intend to enhance these safeguards through the development of a national framework for scrutiny of stop and search by local communities, and consideration of any barriers to increased use of body-worn video. We are also working at all stages of the youth justice system to address disparities, including tightening the tests that courts must satisfy to remand a child to custody to ensure such remands are used only when absolutely necessary.

A number of your Lordships talked about the implementation of the recommendations from the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care*. Our manifesto committed to reviewing the social care system and providing better outcomes for children. As I mentioned already, three important reviews were published last year, including the independent review. The Government are committed to providing a robust response to these reviews. As I said earlier today, our response to the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* will be coming very soon.

I know that your Lordships are rightly concerned about early intervention, which was a key theme of the review. The noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, highlighted the vulnerability of children where the local authority is acting in the capacity of their parent. We absolutely recognise that. Our response will set out a detailed and ambitious strategy to respond to the key issues outlined in the report, including the better use of family networks; ensuring more young people who need care can live in foster care; and improving how we plan, commission and deliver care.

The noble Lord, Lord Davies of Brixton, focused his remarks on young people's mental health. We are investing a further £2.3 billion a year into mental health services by 2023-24, with funding for children's and young people's mental health services growing faster than overall funding. We estimate that this will allow a further 345,000 children and young people to access mental health support. I think that the noble Lord will agree with me that we need targeted mental health intervention but we also, as he eloquently explained, need the earliest possible intervention. That is why we have our Start for Life programme. We have a dedicated £100 million for infant and perinatal mental health services and are putting a further £50 million into parenting programmes, all of which can help to create that resilience for parents and their children which is so badly needed. We are also increasing the rollout of mental health support teams to schools and colleges; they currently cover just over a quarter of pupils but that will increase to around 35% by April.

The noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, and other noble Lords talked about the importance of joined-up services. As the House knows, the Government are a strong supporter of family hubs, which we believe will be the one-stop shops that make it easier for families

with children of all ages to get the support that they need and to access the professionals and partners in a local area. That will make it easier for them to work together, with a focus on supporting and strengthening the family relationships that carry us through life. We are committed to investing £300 million, enabling 75 local authorities to create these hubs, the first of which will be opening later this year.

On child poverty, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham asked me to reassure him that we will be considering both reports that he referred to in his speech. Of course, we will. I think the House knows that the Government believe that the best way of tackling child poverty is by supporting parents to move into work and then progress in work wherever possible. The latest data shows that children in households where all adults work were six times less likely to be in absolute poverty than children where no one worked. With more than 1.18 million vacancies across the UK, our focus remains on supporting people to find work and improve their earnings. We will also continue to work across government, both at ministerial and at official level, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to helping young people out of poverty.

The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, raised the issue of extending school hours. We absolutely acknowledge that extracurricular activities and wraparound childcare play a crucial role in providing a safe, enriching environment for children which supports their well-being and educational development. The House will be aware that looking at our options to strengthen our childcare offer remains a priority for the Government, but we also encourage all schools to take an active part in their communities. So, for example, the funding agreement for all academy trusts includes a specific clause stating that academy trusts must ensure that the academy

“is at the heart of its community, promoting community cohesion and sharing facilities with other schools and the wider community.”

Many schools already do this and make their facilities available to local community groups and sports teams—including, potentially, rugby union teams, to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Addington—in the evening, at weekends or during the school holidays.

Our youth investment fund aims to create and expand facilities for young people, giving them access to thousands of new positive activities each year. We welcome bids that can show how different groups working with a variety of young people can share the spaces we are creating.

A number of noble Lords rightly raised the issue of exclusions. The Government support head teachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted, but clearly the priority is to create environments where all pupils and staff can thrive and reach their potential. We are absolutely clear that permanent exclusion should be used only where absolutely necessary as a last resort, and this should not mean exclusion from education. We absolutely accept that being excluded from school does not mean that you should not be kept safe. We are prioritising support to those at risk of permanent exclusion and are determined to eliminate the poor and, indeed, at times illegal practice of off-rolling children.

[BARONESS BARRAN]

The special educational needs and disabilities and alternative provision Green Paper set out our national vision and delivery model for the alternative provision system to improve children's and young people's well-being and outcomes. As the House knows, we will be publishing our response to that shortly. I think I must let the noble Lord, Lord Addington, judge the level of commitment when he hears those proposals. I absolutely reassure the House that all Ministers, but particularly the Minister for Children and Families, are working tirelessly to make sure that these important reforms are effective and implemented well.

The noble Baroness, Lady Blower, talked about a lack of youth workers and how those numbers had reduced. She will be aware that the Government are supporting youth practitioners in a number of ways. We have developed bursaries for youth work qualifications and funded more than 600 places since 2019. At a national level, the national youth guarantee gives a really clear commitment to young people, backed by more than £500 million investment in youth services, including the youth investment fund, which is building up to 300 new youth centres in levelling up areas.

We absolutely accept the range and value of many different youth services, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the impact that can have on a young person's physical and mental health, and we have invested £7 million to expand access to the D of E in community organisations to make sure that every mainstream school in the country is able to access it.

The noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, asked where the responsibility for NEET sits. It sits between the Department for Education, largely in relation to children aged 16 to 18, or up to 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities—I can write with the details of our responsibilities—and the Department for Work and Pensions when young people become of working age, over the age of 18.

If your Lordships will bear with me for a few seconds more, I would like to finish with an anecdote relating to the stickability idea that the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, raised. I recently visited a school in Sefton that had been in special measures and a new trust had come in to support the school. I was talking to one of the children and I said, "Tell me what it's like here now". She said, "Well, at this school we climb mountains." I looked at her. She said, "Life is about climbing mountains and I am just working out which one I am going to excel at". So stickability lives on in the minds and spirits of our young people.

I look forward very much to working with your Lordships to make sure that, as we bring forward further proposals to support vulnerable adolescents and make sure they grow up in safe and nurturing environments, we can make that the success that we need it to be. I thank the noble Baroness opposite for the spirit of her comments and, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham said, every child is precious, and we absolutely agree that every child deserves and needs to feel loved.

**Baroness Meacher (CB):** Before the Minister sits down, I wonder whether I might pick up one point that the Minister made. Mental health support in schools reaches a quarter of the children who need it at present and the aim is to increase that percentage—

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** My Lords, I am sorry, the noble Baroness was not here at the beginning of the debate, so it is not appropriate for her to intervene. She can certainly write to the Minister, who will respond in writing. Thank you.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab):** My Lords, I want to thank everyone for their contribution today. I am sort of feeling guilty, because I somehow manage to get a slot each time at the end of the business of the week, and people are not able to get back to where they want to get back to—so I apologise for that. I think it has been a really interesting debate. My noble friend Lord McConnell reminded us that this has been going on a long time. I was working with adolescents well over 50 years ago, and working professionally with them for a significant amount of time, too. But we are in different times, as the noble Lord, Lord Addington, acknowledged. There are specific things going on now which I never had to deal with when I was doing detached youth work, or even before then working as a social worker.

This commission was set up at the end of Covid. We know that many children had been very lonely and stuck in their rooms on social media, which was corrosive and damaging, and through which predators were able to reach out to them. Some of them did not have any opportunity to engage in things such as the sports the noble Lord, Lord Addington, talked about. For those nobody had noticed as a potential problem, they and their families were suddenly facing problems they had never imagined. We still do not know what has happened to thousands of the children who went missing because they were not in school or accounted for anywhere. When I was working, in those days, we did not have to worry about what they were seeing and what was being organised on social media.

Yes, there are problems that adolescents have always faced. My social work tutor used to say to me that the problem was that I had a very peaceful and happy adolescence, and maybe it would have been better if I had had a few more of the problems of the young people I was trying to work with. I was always quite grateful that I had not. We know that young people have always faced problems, but at the moment there are problems we really do not know how properly to tackle. Not being at school and not getting the resilience support and training—which, for me, is how we end up with real losses in terms of mental health—they do not know where to go or who to get it from. When I was starting, there were lots of people around who could be their youth worker, their mentor or their friend, but that has been hollowed out.

I know that this Minister thinks about and works on these things very carefully. The reality is that we all need to do that across the board and look for ways we

can identify what is going on in our communities. We never thought there would be this sort of problem in many communities, and there is. As the report says, very often these young people are hidden in plain sight, and these problems are there. We have a responsibility not to give up on these kids and to make

sure they have a future, and that their future family have a future in which the care and the relationship is there for as long as it takes.

*Motion agreed.*

*House adjourned at 5.33 pm.*







