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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
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**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 15 October 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Turkish Incursion into Northern Syria

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Turkey and Syria.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) and thank him for raising this issue in the House. I can tell him, and all Members, that on 9 October, following the US announcement that it would withdraw its troops from the region, Turkey launched a military operation in north-east Syria. Turkish troops have pushed into northern Syrian towns and villages, clashing with Kurdish fighters over a stretch of 125 miles. The UN estimates that at least 160,000 people have been displaced in less than a week.

From the outset, the UK Government have warned Turkey against taking this military action. As we feared, it has seriously undermined the stability and security of the region. It risks worsening the humanitarian crisis and increasing the suffering of millions of refugees, and it also undermines the international effort that should be focused on defeating Daesh. On Thursday 10 October, I spoke to the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and expressed the UK's grave concerns. On Saturday 12 October, the Prime Minister spoke to President Erdoğan to reinforce those concerns and urge restraint. I addressed the issue at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on Saturday. Yesterday, the EU released a statement, which we joined, condemning Turkey's unilateral military action and calling on it to withdraw its forces.

The UK Government take their arms export control responsibilities very seriously. In this case, we will of course keep our defence exports to Turkey under careful and continual review. I can tell the House that no further export licences to Turkey for items that might be used in military operations in Syria will be granted while we conduct that review. Yesterday, as Members will know, the US signed an Executive order to impose limited sanctions on Turkey, including against senior members of Turkey's Government. The EU considered this and, on balance, decided against sanctions at this stage; however, we will keep the position under careful review.

As we condemn this military intervention, it is only right that we also recognise some of the legitimate concerns that Turkey has—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): What legitimate concerns?

Dominic Raab: I will answer the hon. Gentleman's question, if he is willing to listen.

It is only right that we recognise some of Turkey's legitimate concerns in relation to the 3.6 million refugees that it has taken from Syria, and its concerns about the threat to its security from the PKK at its southern border with Syria. For decades, Turkey has been a staunch ally in NATO and one of the largest contributors of military personnel. With close partners, we must at times be candid and clear. This is not the action that we expected from an ally. It is reckless and counterproductive, and it plays straight into the hands of Russia and, indeed, the Assad regime, so the UK Government call on Turkey to exercise maximum restraint and to bring an end to this unilateral military action. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Ellwood: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing further pursuit of this important issue, and I thank the Secretary of State for his response.

In just a week, we have seen the map of north-east Syria redrawn, following the ill-thought-through foreign policy change by President Trump that has triggered a tragic series of events that are now undermining international efforts to contain Daesh. It has forced a counter-Daesh ally, the Syrian Democratic Forces, to resort to asking the Assad regime for help, giving Russia and Iran ever greater leverage in determining Syria's future, while simultaneously diminishing any remaining influence the west can claim to have over the country's future. In the fog of confusion, thousands of hard-line jihadist fighters are now able to escape and regroup to fight another day. If Turkey's safe zone is allowed to go ahead, 3 million Sunni Arab refugees will soon be moved there, fundamentally changing the ethnic make-up of north-east Syria. As so often in conflict, tens of thousands of displaced civilians are attempting to flee the fighting, with many killed and injured.

Direct conflict between Syria and Turkey is now just another notch closer, so I request that Britain steps forward with increased determination to help to resolve this unfolding crisis. I have the following questions for the Secretary of State. What discussions has he had with his US counterparts to invite them to re-engage with the international community on the future of Syria? They cannot back out of their international responsibilities. Does he agree that membership of NATO comes with responsibilities? Will Turkey's actions be reviewed with our NATO allies? Has he spoken with his French and German counterparts to better co-ordinate a European response in relation to any sanctions and, indeed, further arms embargoes? What efforts can be made to seek a UN Security Council response to these unfolding events? Will he concede that we need to address the absence of any legal convention to process IS fighters, including family members, as well as orphans? Let us give the United States their due: they are actually taking back orphans from that region, and we should do the same.

Finally, we speak of the erosion of the rules-based order. Does it not send a worrying message to Russia, given its resurgent activities in eastern Europe, and to China, with its claim over much of the South China sea, if the west does not have the resolve to defend international standards when they are breached by a NATO ally?

Dominic Raab: I share many of my right hon. Friend's concerns, which he expressed both eloquently and powerfully. He made the point about the destabilisation

[Dominic Raab]

of the region, which is absolutely right. Like him, I am concerned that this takes our eye off the ball when it comes to the overriding focus that we should have in counter-terrorism terms on Daesh. It is also set to make the humanitarian situation worse.

My right hon. Friend made a number of other specific points, which I will try to address in turn. We will not recognise any demographic change that is brought about as a result of this incursion. I have been very clear with the Turkish Foreign Minister that any returns must be safe and voluntary. We are also engaged with all our partners—the US and the EU—as my right hon. Friend asked, and he will be aware that the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday adopted conclusions that condemned the Turkish military action for all the reasons that he has raised and that I have made clear. He has also called for a genuine political transition, in line with the Security Council resolutions and the 2012 Geneva communiqué, to be negotiated by the parties within the UN-led Geneva process. Given one of the other points he made, I think that it is worth pointing out the continued efforts of the international community, including at the UN Security Council, to stop this military unilateral action, which we agree is urgently required.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank both you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question and the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) for securing it. As he and I and many other colleagues warned last week, the situation in northern Syria has gone from bad to worse to utterly catastrophic and horrifying since the Trump Administration withdrew their troops and gave a green light to Turkey to invade. As we have seen, it is not just Turkey's airstrikes and artillery barrage that have caused the deaths of dozens of innocent civilians, but the barbaric actions of the jihadi death squads, armed and supported by Turkey, which are now freely operating inside Rojava. May I ask the Minister whether, as part of the Government's welcome review of arms sales to Turkey, which I believe is worth £1.1 billion, they will look specifically at whether any of the arms that our country has supplied to Turkey have ended up in the hands of the jihadi militants?

It is clear to anyone with any understanding of the situation in Syria that if the Kurds did not have the support of the US and faced another Turkish invasion, they would be driven reluctantly into the hands of Assad and Russia simply for their own protection, and, sadly, that has proved correct. Was the Foreign Office in any way surprised at what has recently happened? Yet again, it prompts the question, which I hope the Secretary of State will answer today, about the Government's strategy on Syria. It seems likely that responsibility for tackling the Daesh remnants, escapees, and sleeper cells will fall, not to the coalition, but to the Kurds and the Assad regime between them. It seems likely that the Kurds will be brought into the constitutional reform committee, and that once the other areas are stabilised, there will be a merciless assault on the areas of Idlib held by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, at which point the war will effectively be over. Again, I ask the Secretary of State: what is the Government's strategy? Was he surprised when the Defence Secretary seemed to be a dog in the

manger on the word "condemn" yesterday at the NATO summit? Was he concerned that *The Times* reported his comments as ones that seem to be giving support to the Turkish action, and will he make it clear that we certainly do not support the Turkish action? Finally, may I ask him this very specific question: before Donald Trump took his catastrophic decision to withdraw US troops from Rojava, did he inform the British Government?

Dominic Raab: Let me say at the outset that we share the right hon. Lady's concerns about the worsening humanitarian situation, about the impact that the Turkish intervention has on stability and about the terrorism threat on the ground and more generally. She asks about the export regime. She will know that we have one of the most rigorous and robust export licence regimes in the world, but we keep it under constant review and will continue to do so—particularly in relation to this instance—in the way in which I have described.

The situation on the ground has been very fluid, but we are deeply disappointed with Turkey's decision. The right hon. Lady asks what we need to do now. Well, we now need—more than ever—to have closer co-operation between our international partners, and that means the US and the EU. We do not accept the frankly inaccurate characterisation of the UK's position in Monday's EU Foreign Affairs Council. We work with our partners. There were different views, but we always want to ensure that we take a balanced approach, as our EU partners did. The most important things are the conclusions that were agreed, and which I have set out at some length.

The situation also shows that we need NATO now more than ever. I gently say to the right hon. Lady that that is one of the reasons that it is so irresponsible that the leader of the Labour party has called for us to come out of NATO.

Emily Thornberry: No, no, no—take that back!

Dominic Raab: No; that is well known. We need to be strengthening NATO, not weakening it, as well as working very closely with our UN partners and agencies.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State know of any other policy decision by any ally that has so exposed our troops in combat, weakened our alliances in the region, undermined our essential security partnership in NATO and empowered our enemies in Russia and Iran? Will he perhaps also tell me what he will be doing to ensure that the UK invests more fully in our own defence and security to support the multinational alliances that keep us safe and extend the security that our people rely on around the world?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, raises a number of good points. No, I cannot think of an occasion when such a close NATO ally has behaved in such a way. It raises concerns about the humanitarian situation and the counter-terrorism situation. My hon. Friend is also right to point out that it is all the more reason—an impetus—for us to invest in our military. We are one of leading members of NATO that are committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence, and we are committed to investing; and he will have heard the Chancellor's comments

on future investment. We also need to recommit and reinvigorate the NATO alliance because it is not clear to anyone—at least on the Government Benches—what would replace it.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I am not the Leader of the Opposition's biggest fan, but I think that cheap pot shots at a time like this are utterly unnecessary and demean the office of Foreign Secretary.

This is a brutal and unnecessary conflict. There is a needless humanitarian catastrophe and a refugee crisis, which the Foreign Secretary rightly pointed out, but which has been made much worse. As the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee rightly says, this will have a deep impact on our future ability to build alliances, and alliances that we need—not least given the boots on the ground that the SDF provided.

The Defence Secretary has said that

“Turkey needs to do what it sometimes has to do to defend itself”.

Maybe the Foreign Secretary can tell us exactly what that means.

The Secretary of State mentioned keeping sales of arms under careful review. We have seen how well that has gone in Yemen over the past three years. The UK has leverage here. Why have Germany, France, the Netherlands, Finland and the Czech Republic stopped arms sales, and not the UK?

Finally, will the UK take its responsibilities seriously? We should all pay credit to the bravery of the humanitarian organisations and journalists such as Quentin Sommerville, who discovered in Syria British orphans of parents who had joined IS; surely children do not carry the sins of their parents.

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman. We share his concern, which I think is shared across the House, in relation to refugees. It is clear that the humanitarian situation will be compounded, not made any better, by Turkey's intervention, which also has much broader implications for stability. He is wrong in his comments about export licences. Exports of military arms to Turkey that might be used in this operation have been suspended subject to the review that will take place. In relation to unaccompanied minors or orphans, assuming that they would represent no security threat, that is something—*[Interruption.]* Of course, but the age of minors goes right the way up to close to 18. We would be willing to see them returned home if that can be done in a safe way given the situation on the ground.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Ind): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) for his question and support him in his comments. The UN estimates that there are some 1.6 million people in need in that area of north-east Syria, and since this started this week, a further 200,000 are on the move. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend consulted the Secretary of State for International Development. In other places where the Assad regime has taken back control of an area, access to humanitarian agencies has declined and information about circumstances has become almost impossible to get. It is absolutely essential that this does not happen in future. Will the British Government make sure that that is the case?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has a lot of experience in this. I pay tribute to the work he did at the Foreign Office. I have spoken to the Secretary of State for International Development. We will be engaged, and we are already engaged, very closely with the UN agencies and the non-governmental organisations on the ground. The concern that he raised is absolutely spot on. We share it and we are doing everything we can to alleviate it.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): There can be no doubt that it was the sudden announcement by the US Administration of a decision to withdraw their troops that has led to what Turkey has done, yet we discover that the United States is now imposing sanctions on Turkish Ministries and senior Government officials. The Foreign Secretary said that we need to be clear and candid with our allies, and I appreciate what he has said to the Government of Turkey about what they are doing, but could I encourage him to be equally clear and candid with the US Administration, whose policy at the moment, frankly, has perplexed their allies and friends and is making a bad situation much more dangerous?

Dominic Raab: I thank the Chair of the Brexit Committee. I would share many of his concerns in relation to this. The key point right now is to be working with our allies right across the transatlantic spectrum, with NATO, the US and our European friends, to try to exercise maximum restraint and maximum leverage on Turkey. Both in this case and more generally—because we will see a whole range of threats posed to this transatlantic alliance—we need to work out that some of the differences between us pale into insignificance compared with the challenges and the threats we face. This is one such example. We must redouble our efforts to cement the NATO alliance and work together collaboratively.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): In some respects, NATO has never been stronger—budgets are increasing and readiness is improving—but these actions by Turkey and recent reports of the atrocities being committed by Turkish troops, combined with recent decisions on defence procurement, are incompatible with the values and undertakings of a NATO partner. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will do everything he can to ensure that this issue is gripped within NATO and that any British citizens who are legitimately in that region are protected?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. The Government share her assessment. NATO has never been stronger, but it also faces unprecedented and novel threats and strains within it in relation to burden sharing but also the different political views that are there. In relation to Turkey itself, she makes quite an important point in relation to, I think, the arms purchases from Russia. We need to be very careful to exercise absolute clarity with our Turkish partners and allies to be clear that they must end this incursion, but equally—I think this is the point she was making—to avoid driving Turkey into the arms of Russia and President Putin.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) on securing this urgent question and

[Stephen Twigg]

agree with everything he said. I want to raise with the Secretary of State a specific humanitarian consequence of what is happening, which is about access to water in north-east Syria. I am told that the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent are responding to urgent concerns around the city of Hasakeh, which has a population of 400,000 and may start to run dry shortly. Can he work with colleagues in the Department for International Development to address that as a matter of urgency?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is right. The action by Turkey and the way it has caught not only its international partners but the UN and other agencies on the ground off guard, if I can put it like that, has created a whole range of humanitarian challenges, including the one that he raises. I will speak to the International Development Secretary, and we will work closely with the agencies—the UN and the NGOs on the ground—to ensure we do everything we can to alleviate that.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I commend the Foreign Secretary for his sober and sensible response to what is, after all, a geostrategic disaster. The most immediate threat to British and European security will arise from the escape of Daesh terrorists as a result of the increased conflict in the area. Can he reconsider with his Cabinet colleagues our approach to taking back the people who are of British or European origin and making them face British and European justice, rather than leaving them at risk in the area, and bringing back their families, so that we do not see them raised as another generation of terrorists to threaten us in the future?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. We certainly want to see those responsible for atrocities and crimes given justice in the region, so far as that is practical. One of the key points that has come out of the latest turn of events with Turkey is that that has become more, not less, difficult. In relation to the question of returns, we do not want to see foreign fighters returning to this country, but as I made clear in an earlier answer, we are looking at whether orphans and unaccompanied minors who bear UK nationality can be given safe passage to return to the UK, because, as he said, it is utterly unfair that such innocents should be caught in the crossfire.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary will no doubt have seen the casualties from Turkey's assault on northern Syria on our TV screens. Can he give an unequivocal condemnation of the Government of Turkey's invasion, and can he tell us what steps he is taking to ensure that people in northern Syria are being protected from the invasion by Turkey?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman raises concerns, as others have. As I mentioned earlier, we have, along with our EU partners, condemned Turkey's actions. We have done that because of the humanitarian situation and the impact on refugees and on the broader stability that so many Members are concerned about. We will look at doing what we can to get the swiftest end to that

military incursion, which will put us in the best position, given the circumstances, to alleviate the worsening humanitarian situation.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps are my right hon. Friend and his Department taking to encourage dialogue between Syria, Turkey and the whole region to try to resolve this crisis? Jaw-jaw is much better than war-war.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend will know that there is a wider international effort to see a genuine political transition in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva communiqué. Within the UN-led Geneva process, aside from the immediate concerns about security and the humanitarian situation, we want to see scope for a political transition, and we will encourage the dialogue that she mentioned with that in mind.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, the permission slip for this action was the decision by President Trump to withdraw US troops from the area. General David Petraeus reminded us last week that the Kurds have done most of the fighting and most of the dying in the battle to destroy the ISIS caliphate—a battle that most of us in this House supported. Given these events, what message does the Foreign Secretary think is being sent to those who have stood alongside this country and the United States in the battle against ISIS and the ideology that it represents?

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point in a very cogent way. We do recognise some of the concerns Turkey has in relation to the PKK, but I think this sends the wrong message to our allies and destabilises the broader coalition in favour of tackling Daesh.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I press the Foreign Secretary a little further on the answer he gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis)? The Government's position that they did not want to see British foreign fighters returned to the UK may well have been sustainable when those fighters were incarcerated and under lock and key, but if those foreign fighters, as a result of US and Turkey's action, are now free to roam that area and potentially attack United Kingdom interests both at home and overseas, I am not sure that policy is sustainable. May I ask the Foreign Secretary to review it in the light of these events and see whether a different policy is required to keep the United Kingdom and our people safe?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I understand the point he makes. We have made representations on this very clearly to the Turkish Government; I have made them to the Turkish Foreign Minister. We do not want to see foreign fighters return to the UK. We think the right course is for them to face justice in the region, if that is possible and practical. Of course, however, he is right to say that, given the fluid situation, we will have to keep all of this under review.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On Radio 4 this morning, there was harrowing testimony from a British woman who is a volunteer ambulance driver in the region about the atrocities that she has witnessed. There is a big Kurdish community in Scotland, and they have a community centre at Dumbryden in my constituency. I know that the Kurdish community in my constituency will be very keen to know, as I am, what assistance the UK Government are giving, as opposed to UK volunteers on the ground, and what steps the UK Government are taking to prevent such atrocities from being perpetrated against civilians by our NATO ally.

Dominic Raab: The hon. and learned Lady makes a very powerful point, and I pay tribute to her for the work she does with her community centre for the Kurdish community here. I think a lot of hon. Members in all parts of the House will be in a similar position. The best we can do, given this dire situation, is seek to end Turkey's military incursion as soon as possible, continue to talk with all our partners and allies—right across the spectrum from the United States through to our European partners—and work very closely with the UN agencies to try both to prevent those atrocities from happening and to provide the humanitarian help that many so sorely need.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his very clear statement of condemnation today, but of course part of President Erdoğan's calculation in this brutal assault is that this will be the entirety of our response from this House. Will my right hon. Friend say a bit more about what he thinks the consequences will be for Turkey of US sanctions, and whether he is considering further measures that may persuade Turkey that its assault is brutal and should be ceased?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend, but I cannot speak to the US position. That is for the US, but it has clearly taken its decision, and that is now very clear. On our side, what we want to do is focus on sending a very clear unequivocal message to Turkey that it must bring an end to this military intervention, that it is not going to help Turkey with its sometimes valid concerns that it has, that we are not going to allow demographic change to be unilaterally foisted on the region, and that we would not recognise any return of refugees—I think Turkey has taken 3.6 million refugees and rising, and we are not going to see them returned, or accept or recognise that—unless it is done in a safe and voluntary way. We will have to keep working with all of our partners and redouble our efforts.

Of course, it will not be without consequence for Turkey—a historic, stalwart, staunch ally—to have undertaken this behaviour. Equally, as I mentioned, there are legitimate concerns that Turkey has had. It has felt that it has not been listened to, and we need to encourage Turkey to do the right thing and start behaving the right way, and work with it, rather than force it into the arms of Assad or President Putin.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): President Erdoğan has long planned this attack. There have been proposals to put millions of people—refugees who are in Turkey—across that border. The American Administration, by

giving a green light, have destroyed the credibility of their international alliances; strengthened autocrats, demagogues and dictators, including Putin, Assad and the Iranians; and undermined our international security. Is this not the worst possible time for us to be leaving the European Union, when we need our European partners and friends to work with us in these difficult times?

Dominic Raab: While we differ on Brexit, I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, but it is why we have been engaged with our EU partners. We engaged closely on the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Monday. We have set out clearly our shared condemnation of Turkey and the measures that now need to be taken for Turkey to withdraw and come back into the NATO fold.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): ShelterBox is a great charity based in my constituency, working now with its partners on the ground in north-east Syria to provide a desperately needed humanitarian response. While the public are being very generous in their donations, they and I would like to know how much public money is being committed to this unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that her constituents do and their generosity, and I thank the charitable organisations that work in her constituency. We cannot expect voluntary contributions alone, or even predominantly, to address the scale of the humanitarian suffering that we will now see in Syria. Not only DFID and the Foreign Office but all our international limbs of Government are working closely with all our international partners. I can write to her with the exact amount of money that we are putting into humanitarian relief and aid in that conflict, but it is substantial, and we will continue to do it.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): The whole House will agree with the words that the Foreign Secretary spoke about the actions of Turkey, but the whole world knows that they are happening only because of a decision by the President of the United States. Has the Foreign Secretary or anyone in the British Government conveyed to the White House the view that his decision is not just the action of a very bad ally of the Kurds but the action of a poor ally of the UK?

Dominic Raab: We make clear our views on all these issues right across the range, even when we disagree, to all our partners, as I have made clear in relation to Turkey. The same applies with all our NATO allies. The point now is to bring our allies back together and see a bit more unity of purpose in dealing with the terrible conflict in Syria, the overarching strategic threat that we all face from Daesh and alleviation of the humanitarian crisis that we all agree is utterly deplorable. It needs to be alleviated both for the individuals affected in the region and for the knock-on effects that it will have on the region and indeed Europe.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): What is the risk that UK ISIS fighters will now be freed to fight and kill again? Is my right hon. Friend receiving accurate information on the status of UK ISIS fighters, and indeed ISIS fighters and their security? Are we going to have to fight the ISIS campaign all over again?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend. He is right to raise that concern about foreign fighters. We have made it clear to our US partners, and I have made it clear to the Foreign Minister of Turkey. The situation on the ground is fluid to say the least, but we have to make sure that the Turkish intervention is brought to an end as quickly as possible to avoid precisely the eventuality that he describes.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): For the record, Mr Speaker, my party absolutely does not support the sale of arms to any regimes that carry out human rights violations. The plight of the orphans and the young people is truly appalling. They are frightened and they are alone. What they are going through right now does not bear thinking about. There is a question mark over the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. We do not know how long it will be there for. May I make a plea to the Government to extend that scheme, show compassion, take these young people and settle them in safety here among all of us who care for them?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I will of course take on board his concerns. I can see that they are deeply held and expressed with genuine and sincere passion. I have already explained the situation in relation to unaccompanied minors and orphans, but we will take on board his concerns. We keep the situation under review.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The Foreign Secretary, in his reply to the initial question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), talked about the PKK threat to Turkey across its southern border. When I was there four weeks ago, we could see no evidence of that. What evidence does the Foreign Secretary have for there being a threat across the southern border? The PKK was undoubtedly responsible for giving the SDF the capacity to help stop ISIS in 2014, but since then, from what I could see, particularly with the agreement to allow joint Turkish and American patrols 5 km into the area it controlled over the border, it was bending over backwards to make sure there was no threat or provocation to Turkey from Syria in the south.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend would not expect me to comment on intelligence matters, but what I can say is that we understand Turkey's broader concern in relation to the PKK. The point I was making on both that and the refugee situation is that Turkey has been dealing with some of the implications of the conflict in Syria for a long time. It has now taken over 3.6 million refugees. I think we could do with showing at least some empathy and understanding of what the scale of that involves. I say that by way of setting the context that we need to take a clear-sighted and long-term view. We have been absolutely clear in our condemnation of the action Turkey has taken, but we need to try to get Turkey to come back into compliance by coming out of Syria, ending its military action, and working within NATO rather than at odds with it.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary refers to the 3.6 million Syrian refugees taken by Turkey. I understand that, and I understand

the comments made last week by his colleague the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, when I asked him during the previous urgent question why we do not take more refugees through the resettlement scheme. He said that the UK actually takes very many refugees compared with other countries. However, do the 3.6 million refugees in Turkey not make the case for greater use of refugee resettlement, so that more refugees worldwide can take safe and legal routes to places of safety and the responsibility is shared around the world? Only 28 countries worldwide take refugees through the UN resettlement route. Only about half a million have been taken worldwide so far this year. Will the Foreign Secretary talk to his counterparts to increase that number of countries, so that more countries are willing to take refugees by resettlement?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point, which is that we need to reinforce our international efforts to have a genuinely international approach to the refugee crisis and an equitable approach to those who are bearing the burden of it, while having at the forefront of our minds the terrible suffering that the individuals involved are going through.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend has been clear on Turkey and refugees. President Erdoğan has reportedly said that he would flood Europe with refugees if the United Kingdom and other European Union allies were to take action against Turkey. Will he confirm that that is completely unacceptable from the Government's perspective, and that he will take appropriate action if necessary to impose sanctions and other means if President Erdoğan carries out his threat?

Dominic Raab: At the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on Saturday, I made the point very clearly that that is not the kind of language we expect from a NATO ally. I have explained the position on sanctions, and we will keep it under review. Within the EU, we decided on balance not to go down that path. I agree with my hon. Friend that the refugees in the region cannot be used as some kind of geopolitical pawn against other international partners, particularly European allies.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The anger of the Kurdish community in Scotland and the UK is replicated in a letter I have sent, which has been signed by over 70 cross-party Members of this House. Is it UK Government policy that there should be a no-fly zone across northern Syria, and what is the Foreign Secretary doing to achieve that? Can he assure us that an arms embargo is being reviewed on a daily basis? Some of us believe that there should not be any arms sales to Turkey at all.

Dominic Raab: The concerns relating to a no-fly zone are partly principled and logistical, but they are also about the practicality of enforcing it on the ground. We have made it clear that we have suspended arms exports of anything military that could end up being used in Syria. We will keep the situation under review for that period. The key thing now—the overarching priority—is to get Turkey to withdraw and end the intervention, and then we can look with our international partners at how we take the country and the region forward.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): My good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), makes exactly the right point. I wish to restate that it is totally unacceptable that any refugee could be used as a bargaining chip. Can we have a strong, united statement across Europe, if needs be, to say that that is the case? There are other refugee camps, such those with the Rohingya, where, if sheer volume of numbers gives any country the right to use them as a bargaining chip, we will go down a very slippery slope. I understand the sensitivities over Turkey and the sheer volume of numbers, but it is important that internationally, we say that refugees have rights and no country has the right to have some control over their destiny in that way.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If she looks at the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions from Monday, she will see that the EU gave a very clear message on that. It is a violation of international law to treat refugees in that way. It is totally unacceptable, particularly among allies and friends.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What a contrast between the former President Ford and his treatment of the Vietnamese, when 130,000 Vietnamese were repatriated to the USA under Operation New Life, and President Trump, who has treated his allies, the Kurds, with total contempt and has left them to the mercy of the Turks. There has already been mention of war crimes and people being murdered—the elected representatives of the Kurds. While the US has dallied and neglected its allies, Syria has stepped in. Does it not concern the Minister that while the USA has run away, Syria has filled the gap?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we should be worried about not just the humanitarian and security situation on the ground, but the negative message that we are sending to our partners and allies, and indeed our future partners and allies. They need to know that we are dependable and reliable and that we stick with them.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): We have heard reports that our brave allies, the Kurds, have a staggering 100,000 jihadi fighters under lock and key. First, could my right hon. Friend confirm that that figure is true? Secondly, what exactly are he and other NATO countries doing about these fighters? If they do escape—I believe some have—all hell will break loose. What exactly are we doing with these 100,000 fighters?

Dominic Raab: I cannot verify that precise figure, I am afraid—I would want to check the best information that we have. We are working with our international partners. We have given a very clear message to Turkey about what we expect, and we will obviously have to keep the situation under review. There is no point in kidding ourselves that the action of Turkey has not made things more difficult in relation to foreign fighters that are held in detention—it has—and we will have to work with our international partners, above all in the interest of making sure that we protect UK security.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I could not work out from what the Secretary of State said whether the UK had advocated sanctions at the EU level

and that that had been countermanded by other countries—whether we had played that sort of leadership role or whether there was a more consensual process. It would be really helpful to understand whether his Government will continue to pursue sanctions at the EU level, if that is indeed their policy. If so, which mechanisms will he use to try to advance that? When will his Government abandon their policy of only helping EU citizens when they leave Syrian soil? Obviously, unaccompanied minors cannot do that on their own. Which exact mechanisms exist in the region to have that justice for those potentially guilty foreign fighters that he referred to, because I cannot see any?

Dominic Raab: I share many of the concerns that the hon. Lady expressed. On the UK position, clearly within the EU there are different views on precisely what action should be taken. We joined the conclusions condemning Turkey's military action. As I said, we will keep the issue of sanctions under review. On balance, the EU decided against going down the sanctions route at this stage, given all the competing considerations that I set out, but we have said that we need to continue as an international community to make efforts to resolve this, including through the UN Security Council.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is sad to see the urgency of the question be met with such mealy-mouthed languid complacency. All this talk of reviewing potential future arms sales and of not pursuing sanctions—we even have a Defence Secretary apparently offering some legitimacy to the actions of the Turkish Government—means nothing, does it? From where I am sitting, the Government are feart to say boo to a goose, and, frankly, the Kremlin cannot believe its luck.

Dominic Raab: As is often the case, the hon. Gentleman is confusing bluster with sensible, concerted action in the region. [*Interruption.*] Let me answer the two questions. On arms, we have suspended sales while we conduct a review, so he is not right to say that they are continuing. On sanctions, the question, which has rightly been raised by other EU partners, is whether it would have a deterrent effect on Turkey and how effective it would be in achieving our overarching goal of ending the military incursion. That is what the Government are working towards.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am very grateful for the great sacrifice our Kurdish friends and allies have made, and I am concerned about the long-term impact of Britain being seen as a country that does not fully protect its friends and allies. What specific actions are the British Government taking to protect the Kurdish community in northern Syria and prevent a humanitarian crisis?

Dominic Raab: I share the hon. Lady's concern about the humanitarian and security situation and the message we send to the people we partner and ally with. It is important they know that the UK sticks to its word. We are working with all our partners and allies in the region to bring an end to the Turkish incursion in the way I have described in several responses to hon. Members on both sides of the aisle, and we will continue to do so.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I am extremely disappointed that, as I understand it, Britain held Europe back from going further in applying sanctions. If that is the case, it is deplorable. Has the Secretary of State met or communicated with our friends and allies in the SDF and the north-eastern Syrian authority? I understand that Ministers refused to meet them a few months ago when I brought its leader here. Tomorrow, I will be holding a briefing with generals and the co-leader of the authority in Parliament. Will he come—or send a representative—so that he can hear what they are saying, rather than just listening to dodgy intelligence about the PKK?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is not right to describe the UK's position in that way. We worked with our EU partners and came up with a substantive set of conclusions that we could all agree.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Did you push to go further?

Dominic Raab: On sanctions, the hon. Gentleman will understand that the balance of opinion was against taking action now, but we will keep the issue under review.

Mr Speaker: Mr Russell-Moyle, you are a cheeky chappy, it has to be said. This will be widely acknowledged. You are chuntering from a sedentary position to no obvious benefit or purpose, other than to reiterate the point you have already made on your feet. There is no need to repeat it from your seat, but I think you are addicted to so doing.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2017 produced a report on the UK's relationship with Turkey. One of its recommendations was for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to make a determined effort to persuade Turkey not only to recognise Kurdish territory but to show restraint both in northern Syria and with the Euphrates Shield project. What determined efforts has the Foreign Office made since that report to persuade Turkey to do so?

Dominic Raab: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is reading and raising these issues very carefully. It makes the point about why even now, with this disappointing and very serious situation, we need to try to exert influence on Turkey in the right direction. We expect NATO to do the same and all our allies across NATO. We must use all our efforts to encourage and promote and to coax, cajole and persuade Turkey to desist as soon as possible from its current incursion and come back and work with a joint plan, which is the most likely to be effective in bringing an end to the conflict in Syria and tackling the overarching strategic threat we all face from Daesh.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, I now call an exceptionally well-behaved Member, a very model of decorum in the Chamber at all times. I am referring of course to Mary Glindon.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): I never thought that would be me, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

The KRG and Kurdistan have been at the forefront of defending everyone from Daesh. They have taken in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees and they took in more than 1 million Iraqi refugees when Mosul was attacked. They are a democratic, tolerant nation. What are we doing to support these important allies and protect them against Turkey's military action?

Dominic Raab: I share the hon. Lady's concern. She is experienced and expert in this area. We will work with all our partners, both internationally and on the ground, to try to alleviate the situation. However, I accept the premise, and I will not pretend that it has not become significantly more difficult, given what Turkey has done.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Over the years, the Kurds have been our most important allies in the fight against Daesh. Today I fear that we are complicit in their betrayal, abandoning them to their fate at the hands of the Turkish state. What discussions did the Foreign Secretary have with the Trump Administration before the decision to withdraw US troops? What did he ask of the Trump Administration, and what reply did he receive?

Dominic Raab: I think it quite wrong to suggest that the UK Government have been complicit in this. The hon. Gentleman should not let Turkey off the hook for its responsibility; the focus should be on condemning that.

We are, of course, engaged, and I have regularly engaged with my US counterpart and, indeed, all our European partners throughout my time as Foreign Secretary. We have expressed our view, both to them and to Turkey, that there should be no unilateral military action by Turkey in relation to Syria.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I note that the Foreign Secretary has not responded to my hon. Friends the Members for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) on the question of the starting point for the UK in discussions about sanctions at the EU level. However, may I ask him specifically about what the Defence Secretary said at NATO? Apparently, he said:

"Turkey needs to do what it sometimes has to do to defend itself." Is it our position that Turkey's actions constituted an act of self-defence, or do we believe that this was an act of aggression?

Dominic Raab: We are absolutely clear that we condemn Turkey's military intervention, as we did with our EU partners.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): First, I think that this is a betrayal of the Kurds on the part of both the west and the Americans. Secondly, the Turks are there in the north and it will be a job to get them out. Thirdly, and more importantly, this will have serious consequences: it could lead to a serious conflict.

We have let the Kurds down badly. The Foreign Secretary should really consider flying to Washington—if we are such an important ally—to meet Congress leaders and the President of the United States face to face, because we are getting ourselves into a dangerous situation.

Dominic Raab: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, in that I share his concerns. I was in Washington recently, not just to meet members of the US Administration but to talk to congressional members about the whole gamut of foreign policy issues. We are as closely engaged as possible with our US and, indeed, our EU partners. What we need to do now is bring back some unity and some resolve in NATO, among all its partners, and obviously that must include Turkey.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is quite clear that the Kurdish people feel abandoned. A great many of my constituents are of Kurdish origin. This has left a vacuum, but, according to reports, the Pentagon was not even involved: it was a unilateral decision made by the President. In the wake of the revelations that are emerging about Ukraine, President Zelensky and Donald Trump, does the Foreign Secretary believe that the motives behind that decision with the Turkish President could indeed be personal?

Dominic Raab: No, I have no reason to believe that that is the case.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Plymouth's Kurdish community are not just concerned about a military incursion; they are concerned about an occupation, because they know that an occupation will lead to ethnic cleansing, and ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity. Can the Foreign Secretary say from the Dispatch Box that he will order the UK's considerable assets to collect evidence, and that if there is evidence of crimes against humanity, he will use it to prosecute Turkey for its illegal actions against the Kurds?

Dominic Raab: I understand the depth of the hon. Gentleman's concern. It is not clear to me where he thinks that a prosecution would or would not take place, but as someone was formerly a war crimes lawyer, I would absolutely want any serious violations of international humanitarian law to lead to people being brought to account.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I met a group of Kurdish constituents on Friday, and they were dismayed at what had happened. They were disappointed by what they saw as a weak response from the international community, and they were firmly of the view that the UK had a special responsibility to help to resolve the

situation, given our historic influence in the region. The Foreign Secretary says that the situation is under review. Can he tell my constituents what needs to change on the ground in order that he and the EU might consider further action, including sanctions?

Dominic Raab: The action we want to see changed on the ground is for Turkey to withdraw, and we are looking at what is the most effective means of engaging with Turkey and encouraging it to withdraw as quickly as possible and undertake maximum restraint. We will continue to do that, and obviously we will look closely at all the levers and approaches that we need to take in order to achieve that objective with our European, as well as our American, partners.

Emily Thornberry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I wonder if I could get your assistance. How can I, first, correct the record and, secondly, force the Foreign Secretary to withdraw his thoroughly misleading comments about the Leader of the Opposition's commitment to NATO? He has never spoken about withdrawing from NATO. Our support for the NATO alliance is absolute and we are committed to spending the 2%. The shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), was as outraged as I was to hear the silly, partisan comments that were being made, and indeed we have been together to see NATO and discuss how Labour would work in future with NATO.

Mr Speaker: I think that the shadow Foreign Secretary has found her own salvation in the sense that she has made her point with force and alacrity and it is on the record. As for the question of forcing the Foreign Secretary to withdraw, I do not have a list of statements that have been made by particular Members at given times, and therefore I am not in a position to say whether a withdrawal is required. The Foreign Secretary is a cerebral intellectual type—that is his normal approach—but today I could tell that he wanted to mix it. Now, mixing it is a matter of taste really rather than a matter of order, so I think that I have to leave it to the Foreign Secretary, who seems to be resolutely seated, to judge whether he needs to correct the record, but whether he does or not, the right hon. Lady, in her mellifluous tone, has put the record straight as far as she is concerned, and I hope that that is a source of some succour to her as she goes about her daily business.

Racism in Football

12.32 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to make a statement on the racist abuse that was aimed at England players in their match against Bulgaria.

The Minister for Sport, Media and Creative Industries (Nigel Adams): Like all Members of this House and the country, I was appalled by the disgusting racist abuse encountered by the England football team and its support staff in Bulgaria last night. Whether you are a player, a manager, a supporter or a member of the staff no participant in sport should have to tolerate discrimination of any kind. May I also start by paying tribute to the leadership shown by Gareth Southgate and his coaching team as well as all the players for how they conducted themselves in appalling circumstances during and after the match? I have also spoken this morning to the chief executive of the Football Association to express my support for Gareth Southgate and his team and all the support staff of the FA on the way they conducted themselves.

We have made progress in this country to combat discrimination in our domestic game and make our stadiums more welcoming places to be. The Government are supporting a number of anti-racism initiatives, including the Premier League's "No room for racism," "Show racism the red card" and "Kick it out" campaigns, all of which have achieved a great deal in this area, and in February my predecessor in this role held a summit on discrimination with a range of bodies acting within football, but it is clear that we cannot be complacent, and we must remain a leading voice on this issue internationally.

International competitions such as this one should bring cultures and countries together. It was a step in the right direction to see the UEFA protocol engage last night—for the first time, I understand—but it is clear that much more needs to be done to stamp out racism in the game. I am also encouraged by the reaction of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, who has spoken out and called for changes at the Bulgarian Football Association.

UEFA must now get its response right, and leave no doubt that the consequences of failing to tackle this issue will be severe. I am writing today to the UEFA president, urging him to conclude UEFA's investigations swiftly and to ensure that all football authorities and fans are clear that the consequences of failing to tackle this issue will be severe. The England team has my full support and I expect tough action from UEFA in response to this.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call the shadow Minister, as I have a sense that this matter will unite the House, I would like to thank the Minister for what he has said and to say from the Chair what I think will be the feeling of colleagues—namely, that Gareth Southgate has again shown what a magnificent ambassador for England and, indeed, the UK he is, and also how magnificently the team behaved in circumstances of intense provocation and vile behaviour by so-called fans. The team conducted themselves with extraordinary

dignity. One of my own children was watching the match and came in to say how shocked and upset he was. The Minister's reaction is one that I have a sense will be shared right across the House and by millions of people across the country. Colleagues' voices will now be heard.

Dr Allin-Khan: Thank you so much for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I would like to echo everything that you have just said. Last night, we saw the most horrific racist abuse aimed at England players in their match against Bulgaria, which caused the match to be halted on two occasions. Photos and clips followed of fans performing Nazi salutes, and the racist chanting continued. It is utterly deplorable. I had a conversation with the FA's chief executive last night during the match, in which I reiterated our support for the England players. The entire country will be proud of the England team last night, and Gareth Southgate has shown true leadership in defence of his players. This abuse must be stamped out. No one should have to arrive at work to be subjected to any form of discrimination, so why are our players still being subjected to this? In future, if players decide to walk off the pitch in protest, they must have the full support of this House, our press and the football bodies.

We ourselves, however, are not exempt from this problem. It would be irresponsible for us to condemn the behaviour of fans around the world without addressing the fact that many players have indeed suffered racist abuse online, from the stands and in their day-to-day lives at the hands of a small section of our own fans. I know that the Government have committed to writing to UEFA, which I really welcome, but will the Minister outline what further steps they are taking to address the scourge of racism in sport? UEFA has a duty to act here. The world is watching. A fine is not enough, so I am asking our Government to ensure that we are backing up the FA to seek the harshest possible punishments. Stadium bans are a must, and forfeiting matches and expulsion from tournaments must not be ruled out. Enough is enough. The time to act is now.

Nigel Adams: I echo every single word that the hon. Lady has just uttered. I know that she is incredibly passionate about football, and other sports as well. I sense that this is a bit of a pivotal moment. We have experienced these issues for far too long, but I think there is a collective desire to see action taken. I fully support the way the FA swiftly launched its complaint, the way UEFA is undertaking its investigation and the way the players handled themselves on the pitch. They let the football do the talking in the second half, but this situation clearly cannot go on, and UEFA should rule nothing out in terms of sanctions.

As I said previously, my predecessor hosted a summit with all the football authorities in England. Our Department is outlining its plans and how it will take them forward. That follows a summit on the issue earlier in the year, which involved players, coaches, fan groups, players' representatives, a policing unit and campaign groups. There are a lot of proposals and plans that we will be working on, including stronger education measures, better reporting systems and better training and support for referees. Incidentally, I commend the referee last night for the way he handled himself and the way he supported the English players, giving them the option of step 2 of the UEFA protocol. As the hon. Lady

knows, there is still more to do; it is vital that the football authorities continue to prioritise tackling this despicable abuse, and we expect them to do that.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this urgent question. I also take this opportunity to welcome the Minister on his first outing at the Dispatch Box; I can assure him that he has the best job in Government.

I agree with everyone that we should applaud the reaction of the players, the management, the FA administration and, of course, the fans, and the way that they responded to last night's appalling and vile racist abuse. However, does the Minister also agree with the chairman's comments in the post-match interview, where he said that we cannot necessarily take the moral high ground on this issue because, while we have made progress on tackling racism in English football, there is still so much more that we need to do at every single tier of football in England?

Nigel Adams: I start by thanking my hon. Friend for all the brilliant work she did in this Department and with this brief over many years. I know she is still very active in this sector. She is right that we need to get our own homework done before we start preaching, but the problem is of such a huge scale that when international problems such as this arise, we must speak up and we must demand action. She is 100% right that we still need to clear up the mess on our own doorstep.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I, too, welcome the Minister to his place. This is a deeply serious issue, but it would be fair to say that it is entirely likely that I had never wanted the England team to win, and to win so well, until last night. I am delighted that they did their talking on the pitch, although of course they should have the right to walk off the pitch in those circumstances if they so choose.

However, it would be wrong to portray last night's disgusting scenes as isolated incidents. The truth is that they are not. Racist chants and abuse form part of a growing and consistent pattern through parts of the game across Europe. This must mark a seminal moment, as the Minister said, in how football authorities crack down and eradicate racism of all kinds in our sport. Does he agree that, despite the progress last night in enforcing the three-step protocol for the first time, the fines and sanctions currently imposed by UEFA are simply not fit for purpose and do not form anywhere near enough of a deterrent?

We cannot have the Serbian FA fined €80,000 for fans' racist chanting while former Arsenal striker Nicklas Bendtner was fined €100,000 for displaying a betting firm's logo. These are hate crimes and should be treated as such by UEFA. What actions will the UK Government take to ensure that UEFA is pressured into recognising that reality?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is correct: the severity of the penalty must match the offence. Clearly, this is a matter for UEFA, but that is why I have written to their president today. We expect the penalties to be severe. It is not the first incident; we experienced it with the Montenegro game. The idea that we have bunches

of people making Nazi salutes and doing monkey chants—these are sub-human behaviours—cannot be tolerated. I look to UEFA in the strongest terms to deal with this particular incident as severely as possible.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I completely support the comments from Members on both sides of the House on how UEFA should demonstrate that real sanctions will be applied against national FAs that allow this to happen in their stadiums. Does the Minister agree that the Government's proposals to legislate on online harms is an opportunity to look at the vile racist abuse that many footballers in this country receive on social media, which is a growing problem, and that we should look again at the status of homophobic abuse in sports stadiums in this country, too? There are big concerns about the increase in homophobia, and we should look again at the Football (Offences) Act 1991 to make homophobic abuse illegal in the same way as racist abuse so that both have the same status in law.

Nigel Adams: I totally agree that any form of abuse is unacceptable. We have seen footballers like Paul Pogba, Troy Deeney and Tammy Abraham receive such abuse online through social media. We want to tackle it, and we will work closely with the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We have been clear that social media companies need to do more, and we will hold them to account on this issue.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a privilege of mine to be president of my hometown football club, Blaenavon Blues. Although, of course, we try to promote the best behaviour at grassroots level, an example has to be set by the highest body in the game in Europe. Will the Minister make it clear to UEFA that if it fails to act properly on last night's awful racist abuse, it will have consequences right across the game?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is spot on. We are making that clear and, as I said, I am writing to the president of UEFA today to say that enough is enough. We have seen too many examples of this horrific abuse. We saw it on TV, and there was CCTV in the crowd—the FA also had monitors in the crowd. It is beyond belief that this is still happening, and we will support the FA, which is unable to comment today because it has asked for an investigation to be launched. We expect the UEFA response to be robust.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment and agree wholeheartedly with all that has been said so far. Is it not important that, in the support we give to players, we send a signal not just from this place but from football authorities, national and international, that if those players choose to stay on the pitch, in the face of this awful abuse, they will have our admiration for their courage and commitment to the sport, but that if they choose to walk off the pitch, we will respect that choice, too, and there will be no negative consequences for their career, either in the short term or the long term?

Nigel Adams: The former Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is absolutely right about there being complete support. There was an opportunity

[Nigel Adams]

for the players to walk off the pitch for 10 minutes last night, just before half time—that is step 2 of the protocol—and I commend the referee again for giving them that opportunity, but they decided to stay on as there were only four or five minutes left. It absolutely should be down to the players, and we will respect their choice. The FA would respect it, and I am pleased to see that the referee would also have respected it last night.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Minister calls it exactly right—this is an issue that unites the House. Several Members on both sides have applauded Gareth Southgate, the manager of the England men's football team, and I hope you will allow me to read his words into the record, Mr Speaker:

“Sadly, because of their experiences in our own country, they”—

our players—

“are hardened to racism. I don't know what that says about our society but that's the reality.”

As a football supporter—I support Liverpool football club—I take my share of responsibility for the damage racism has done to our society. What will the Minister do to make sure we tackle this racism at its core in our society? What money will he put forward for truly inclusive sports education in schools so that we can make sure that we bring up the next generation to know this is wrong?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is, again, right. We share a passion for Liverpool football club. I fear that I have opened myself up to some online abuse by admitting that. Commending the words and actions of Gareth Southgate is absolutely the right thing to do, and she is also spot on about stronger education measures. I know the football authorities are keen to pursue this area, and we will consult and keep in touch with them. I have met them a couple of times, and this issue has already been on the agenda during my short tenure in this post. We will monitor how the authorities implement their plans through the season, but she is absolutely right about education.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I watched my first football match in 1977, and it took until 1990 for us to see anti-racism messages coming out in our football. I know the Minister will agree that it has taken UEFA and FIFA far too long to get a grip on this issue. The fact that this is the first time the protocol has been enacted indicates that those two bodies have not taken this issue seriously enough. The Minister is going to write to UEFA, but will he consider going to meet UEFA and FIFA to express the anger of this House and the fact that we believe that enough is enough?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: enough is enough. I am sure my letter will be published shortly and he will be able to see its contents. I am happy to meet UEFA and FIFA any time to get across the mood of this House. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this urgent question. It is going loud and clear to UEFA that action needs to be taken. We have had far too many incidents of this and UEFA must get its response right. There must

be no doubt in the mind of any football authority that the consequences of failing to tackle this issue will be severe.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The England football team, like most of our sports teams, is a fantastic advert for not only the best talent in this country but the diversity of our society. I welcome the Minister's comments about the steps we have to take to protect that, but we also have to look outwith the sports field to make sure we protect the same sort of diversity in our boardrooms, management structures and politics. Will he therefore assure me that we will do the same in other areas in life as he has promised to do in sport?

Nigel Adams: Absolutely. We should be intolerant right across society of any form of abuse. I did not want to pick out players, but I will pick out Tyrone Mings, who made his debut last night. What a brilliant young man, and what a great advert he is for football and for Aston Villa, as shown in the way he handled himself on the pitch, talking to the referee, and afterwards in his post-match interview. No young man on his debut should have had to witness that abuse, but to have handled it in the way he did, and the dignified way he handled himself after the match, means his family, his team and the whole country should be incredibly proud of Tyrone Mings.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): As somebody who has watched football for more than 50 years, I have often been disgusted by the behaviour of some people who attend football matches, and last night we really did sink to a new low. We are talking about racism in football, but in some ways this was even worse than that, because this was abuse of people because of the colour of their skin. That is absolutely shameful. Do we not all have a responsibility to correct this? Liverpool football club has been mentioned. I remember Liverpool being thrown out of and banned from competitions many years ago because of the behaviour of some so-called “supporters”. Should not the same be applied in this case?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that. I have to say that the sanctions are a matter for UEFA, but I am sure it will be watching this closely and will know from this House that people want no sanction ruled out.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): When, after the Montenegro match in April, I suggested we take UEFA to the European Court of Human Rights for a repeated failure to provide a working environment free from racism and homophobia for football players, I was told that we were going to have meetings. Now I am told we are going to have letters. What will it take to get some action? Does the Minister agree that when it comes to discrimination in football, financial transparency and ownership, football governance does not meet the needs of football fans?

Nigel Adams: I know the hon. Lady is a passionate Newcastle United supporter and has written to me on the issue of football governance, and I have replied. We are taking a close interest in how football governance is conducted and, if necessary, action would be taken.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): As a West Brom fan, I must admit I was rather less keen on Tyrone Mings last May, but, as the Minister said, he was magnificent last night, with his strength of character. The Football Association chairman said that there are many at UEFA with very strong feelings about racist abuse, but, sadly, those feelings often seem to be rather quiet. Is it not time that these people not only spoke up, but took proper action to stamp out the vile abuse that we witnessed last night?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: there is no excuse for what happened last night. What makes it even worse is the fact that this has happened previously. As I said, this is a pivotal moment—it is a turning point. The fact that we are having this debate in the Chamber and not in Westminster Hall sends a strong signal to UEFA that we want to see action of the severest kind on these incidents.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): As a Newcastle United fan, I am very aware that we are not without significant remaining problems here in the UK, but I hope that this is a watershed moment. Unfortunately, UEFA has paid lip service to this issue for decades. The Bulgarian stadium in Sofia was part closed last night due to previous infractions, but despite that the Bulgarian team manager, who was interviewed after the game, seemed oblivious to events happening around him and did not seem to understand what racism is and what constitutes racist abuse of players and/or other fans. UEFA has a clear responsibility not only to act where racism occurs, but to be proactive, as the European governing body of football, to educate the constituent football associations, clubs, officials, players and, yes, fans of clubs and nations across Europe and to act as a beacon within FIFA to stamp out racist abuse across the whole of the world. Our Government must urge UEFA to act properly—enough is enough.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman, whom I know to be a passionate Newcastle United supporter, because I recall a sign above his office door—it was welcoming to other clubs, too. [*Laughter.*] He is absolutely right in what he says; there is nothing I can disagree with him on about this. We need action, not talk. We have been very clear in our communication today with UEFA. The Prime Minister has spoken out today in very clear terms. It is about time this House was united on something and I sense this issue is uniting the House. Be in no doubt that this Government want to see action by UEFA.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I welcome the statement that the Minister has given to the House. It is true that we have a chequered history on this issue in our country, but where we have seen instances of this taking place the police have, in general, been robust in their actions against it. What was particularly disappointing last night was that there was little evidence of the Bulgarian police taking action against those fans who were taking part in this vile behaviour. Will the Minister therefore assure the House that in his discussions with the Bulgarian authorities he will raise the issue of what, if anything, the Bulgarian police did about this behaviour last night?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is right. A UEFA investigation is under way, and it is absolutely right that that should form part of that investigation. I understand that a number of the individuals—the reports are that these people were dressed in black, and I would say they were extremists—who were at that football game were taken out of the stadium around half time, but it is absolutely right that, through the investigation, we see what lessons are to be learned in respect of the actions of the Bulgarian police.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is great to hear the whole House in support of the football team last night—not just Gareth Southgate, but in particular those lads who had to go about their jobs just yards from the most vile and horrific abuse that no one should have to endure on the football pitch. It was fantastic to see them getting the ball in the back of the net and showing their worth in that way. It was magnificent.

A lot of discussion has already taken place about getting our own house in order. The FA still has a long way to go towards representing England as a country and as a society. Currently, only 13% of the FA's coaching staff are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, with the proportion in leadership roles at only 5%. How can we expect the young people of the future to see a career in football unless the FA looks more like the society it represents?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. It was not just the players who were the victims of the abuse last night; it also affected the FA's support staff, and cameramen who were of colour were abused and visibly shaking. It did not just affect the players. The best role models for diversity in football are those magnificent players who took to the pitch last night. It was just amazing to see how diverse the England football team looks. Hopefully, that will inspire many other men and women and girls and boys from all different backgrounds to take up our national game.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Stoke City football club is based in my constituency and has been doing some excellent work to promote diversity in the game. Does the Minister agree that we need to make sure that we support our local clubs to do much more work to ensure that the game is as diverse and inclusive as possible?

Nigel Adams: I do, and it is essential that we learn from examples of good practice. It is encouraging to hear of those examples at Stoke City, and I would be more than happy to come to Stoke and meet people at Stoke City to see what innovative action they are taking. That is very encouraging.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, a Manchester City fan; I call Mike Kane.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): And very proud of Raheem Sterling I am, too.

I wish to carry on from the point made by the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) about what we are doing in our communities. I am

[Mike Kane]

desperately worried about alt-right groups targeting sports and gym clubs on the estates in my constituency with alt-right messaging. I am working with the global Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the organisation Initiatives of Change International to produce a toolkit for communities, so that they can improve cohesion and combat such messages. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the project?

Nigel Adams: I am absolutely more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss what sounds like an innovative approach. I promise that at that meeting I will not remind him of who sits atop the premier league at the moment.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I am a Villa fan, and our recent victory over Norwich was marred by the fact that a small number of Villa fans were chanting racist abuse against the appropriately named Marvelous Nakamba. He was clearly unfazed by it, but the reaction of the fans and the club was utter condemnation. Does that show that if we work with the clubs and the fans we will eventually be able to kick racism out of football?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is spot on. I remind the House that racist and homophobic chanting at football matches is a criminal offence. It is quite simple. Action can be taken, and we have provided some funding to Kick It Out to ensure that all hate crimes, whether during a game or on social media, are accurately recorded so that the necessary action, including on whether to involve the Crown Prosecution Service, is taken.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Are the Government aware of the excellent Show Racism the Red Card campaign, spearheaded by the Irish Football Association, which targets young people in an educational environment to show how football can bring people together? Will the Government fund and support other initiatives of a similar nature throughout the United Kingdom?

Nigel Adams: We are indeed aware of the excellent work that Show Racism the Red Card does. There are a number of campaign groups in this space in football, including Kick It Out and, indeed, Stonewall, which is taking action on homophobic abuse. We provide funding for these groups, and we are more than happy to look at how we can work with them to ensure that this vile behaviour is indeed given the boot.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Here stands another Scot who cheered England on to their resounding victory last night in the face of disgusting and shameful scenes. Does the Minister agree that the UEFA three-step protocol is some progress? Is it possible that we can build on that in this country to tackle the scourge of racism? In Scotland, we have a particular, deeply embedded problem with sectarianism; in his opinion, could it be applied in that context as well?

Nigel Adams: In my opinion, I see no reason why not. Last night was the first time the UEFA protocol was used in an international game, and I think it worked incredibly well. The support of the UEFA officials and

the referee is needed. The players had made a collective decision just before half time to stay on the park, and the management and the officials supported them. It turned out to be the right decision, because I understand that the main protagonists—the lunatics—were ejected at half time. There may have been some pockets of verbal abuse during the second half, but the players decided to let their feet do the talking.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I must confess that the Minister took some of the wind out of my sails: I was going to ask him if he agreed with me about the magnificent professionalism and dignity of Tyrone Mings on his debut. He was a great player for Ipswich Town and he is a great player for Aston Villa and for England. Will the Minister agree to write to each and every one of the England players who were at the match, to tell them just how proud their country is of their behaviour?

Nigel Adams: If I have burst the hon. Gentleman's bubble, he may have burst mine as well, because plans are in place for someone more senior than me to do exactly that.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): In terms of ability and character, this young England football team enhanced their reputation last night, as did their coach Gareth Southgate. They are a credit to themselves and to the entire nation. Is the Minister aware that under the complex qualification process there is a real possibility of Scotland playing Bulgaria in a European championships play-off match? Will he write to all the home nations' football associations, and to the devolved Administrations, to assure them that if any of the countries of the home nations hear far-right chants or their players are racially abused they will get the full support of the UK Government?

Nigel Adams: One hundred per cent. That is where it appears as if the protocol will be effective. It is absolutely right that we back the players. Ultimately, it is the players' call if they want to walk off the pitch. If it ends up going to step 3, it is a call for the officials as to whether to abandon the game completely. It is not for politicians to over-interfere in the running of football, but on an issue such as this, which is a social problem, it is absolutely right that we, in the strongest terms, have our say and support our players who are suffering.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) for securing this urgent question. I, too, want to praise England's players for their calm professionalism in their defiance of racism. My son adores football and he is actually an exceptional player, but in the interests of him and of many other young people, we really need to do what is best to stamp out racism in football at all ages and at all levels. What are the Government doing to give meaning to the words "zero tolerance" of racism in football and, indeed, in other sports as well?

Nigel Adams: There should be absolute zero tolerance. I am encouraged to hear that the hon. Lady's young son is a keen footballer, and it should absolutely be the case that, when he goes to play, nobody on that pitch is subject to any form of abuse whatsoever. We are working

incredibly closely with the football authorities. We are very keen to see that their revised approach to tackling this issue is followed through, which includes, as I have said, stronger education measures, reporting systems, training and support for referees and stewards, the use of CCTV to recognise offenders and the innovative use of body cameras on stewards, which would be very useful for recording such incidents.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I welcome the Minister's statement and the Minister to his place. I also congratulate the England men's team on a resounding win in the face of disgusting racist abuse. Does he agree that UEFA and FIFA have been flat-footed for far too long on this issue? We had a football team in Livingston where I grew up. If a person swore in the stadium, they were chucked out, because there were so many children, young people and families present. That is the kind of atmosphere that we should be fostering and encouraging. Will he make sure that UEFA and FIFA are not allowed to put profit before prosecution or action on this issue?

Nigel Adams: Again, the hon. Lady is spot on. UEFA has to get its response right on the basis that this has been going on for far too long and that this is not the first incident. All football authorities must be left in no doubt that failure to tackle this issue has severe consequences.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In July, my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) held a debate in this Chamber on the subject of racism in sport. Will the Minister tell us what action his Government have taken as a result of that debate, because, as last night's disgraceful event showed us, there is a need for more action and less talk?

Nigel Adams: I am aware that my predecessor responded to the debate secured by the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan). There has been further action and communication between our Department and the football authorities. A summit followed that debate, which was attended by the policing unit, campaign groups and all the footballing bodies. We are looking for some of the measures that I have outlined in my previous answers to be implemented. There has also been an announcement of an increase in the minimum sanctions for discriminatory behaviour to a 10-match ban. This is subsequent to the debate to which the hon. Lady refers, but there is still absolutely more to do. It is vital that the football authorities continue to prioritise tackling this despicable behaviour.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the work that he has done over the past 24 hours and for the work that he will do in the future in tackling the scourge of racism. What we are talking about in one example was people dressed in black shirts making the Nazi salute. These elements of racism are being pushed on social media platforms. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), he said that there was more to do. May I ask him to press the Culture Secretary and, indeed, the Prime Minister to bring forward the online harms Bill that was mentioned in the Queen's Speech? That would mean that social media companies can start to be tackled and regulated so that they are unable to have excuses and to say, "Oh we can't take down these pictures of people making Nazi salutes at football matches

because it takes too long to process." We need the Bill. We need it to be stronger and to ensure that this type of racism is not fuelled by the social media platforms.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is correct. As I have said, what we saw last night—extremists dressed in black, making Nazi salutes and making monkey chants—was bordering on the subhuman and should not be tolerated. Online abuse—any form of online abuse—should not be tolerated. With regard to the online harms Bill, we will be undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny and working with industry in this Session to deliver exactly the sort of results that he wants to see. We have made it absolutely clear that social media companies need to do more, and this Government will hold them to account.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I commend the England team and their manager for their dignity last night. Sadly, racism is still too much of a feature in football, both at club and at international levels. The Minister has mentioned the three-step protocol, but does he support further mandatory measures such as the forfeiture of games if racism does not stop during the game? Does he agree that we must not place players and fans in the situation where they go to enjoy the beautiful game and find it defiled by the ugliness of racism?

Nigel Adams: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. The forfeiture of games and other such measures are clearly matters for the football authorities, not the Government; that is absolutely correct. None the less, we need to be absolutely clear that our very strongly held view is that no measure should be taken off the table.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I do not mind admitting that I am not a fan of football, but I am very proud of the fact that the world's first black professional football player played for my home town in Darlington. What shocked me the most this morning on hearing about all this were the comments of the Bulgarian manager. It just seems to me that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) rightly said, we will make no progress on this while the first reaction of people in positions of leadership, responsibility and influence in the game, such as managers, is to minimise and deny what has happened.

Nigel Adams: I, too, was shocked by the Bulgarian coach's response. It was as though none of this had happened: he had not seen it; he had not heard it; and he shrugged his shoulders. It was rather incredible. That does not help when we are trying to erase this evil from the game. I was very encouraged by the comments of the Bulgarian Prime Minister. I do not think that there was much more that we could have asked him to say or do. The fact is he may consider taking away funding from the Bulgarian FA unless its president loses his job. I am very grateful to him for his remarks.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister was quite complimentary about the way that the protocol worked last night. Kick It Out has issued a statement, saying that

"UEFA must explain why players weren't sent to the dressing room during Step Two, as is clearly stated in the rules. TV footage also clearly shows that racist abuse continued in the second half, so it is unacceptable that Step Three was not enforced. This match should have been abandoned by the officials."

[Kerry McCarthy]

Will the Minister reach out to staff at Kick It Out and perhaps discuss his interpretation of the way that the protocol worked with theirs?

Nigel Adams: I am more than happy to speak to Kick It Out about its interpretation. Having spoken to the FA and having received its intelligence, I can say that it is the players' call. It should be the players' call. We must support what the players want. They are the ones who, along with the officials and the support staff, are receiving this abuse. They made the decision to stay on during step 2 for the last four or five minutes. The FA did have spotters in the crowd, and the intelligence indicated that the abuse was going on. That might not be the case, because we cannot fill a whole stadium with officers, so it was a call for the players, and I support that, but I am more than happy, as the hon. Lady suggests, to have a conversation with Kick It Out.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): As a very proud "out" football player in my youth—I was fabulous in defence and more fabulous than good at stopping surges down the right wing—I recognise that the people who gave me homophobic abuse were frequently the same as those who gave out racist and misogynistic abuse as well. May I ask the Minister what steps he can take to encourage clubs right across the country to show in our games this weekend that there is no place for racism or homophobia at the international or the grassroots level anywhere in our country?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman represents the fine city of Plymouth, and I may surprise him by saying that I am going to out myself today as well—as having been probably the only Member of Parliament to have played for Plymouth Argyle Supporters Association London Branch, back in the '90s. Not only that, but I scored two goals for PASALB in my prime, some years ago. [Laughter.] Not that long ago.

It is absolutely essential that we send a message loud and clear from this place to all football grounds and all sports grounds throughout our nation: racism will never ever be tolerated, and we need to crack down on the perpetrators.

Mr Speaker: I thank all colleagues for the content and tone of these exchanges, which I think will be appreciated and mirrored in the reaction of members of the public across the country and beyond.

Imprisonment of Catalan Leaders

1.20 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the imprisonment of Catalan leaders.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Christopher Pincher): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this urgent question. I appreciate it is a question that will drive passions among him and individually among other right hon. and hon. Members of this House, but the position of Her Majesty's Government on Catalonia is clear: it is a matter for Spain. The United Kingdom strongly supports the rule of law and remains clear that political leaders, like anyone else, have a duty to abide by the law. Questions related to Catalan independence should be resolved within the proper constitutional and legal channels, and questions related to the legal penalties handed down by the courts of Spain are a matter for Spain and its democratic institutions.

Hywel Williams: I thank the Minister for that answer, as far as it went.

Many Members of this House have been concerned by the cases brought before the Spanish Supreme Court against 12 Catalan political and civic leaders on charges of sedition, the embezzlement of public funds and disobedience in relation to the 2017 referendum on Catalan independence. I wish to make it entirely clear that my question today is about what happened yesterday and that it is not about whether independence is right or wrong.

Nine of those accused have already been held in preventive detention for nearly two years and have been visited by Members of this House, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the Senedd of Wales. Yesterday, they were sentenced. One of those sentenced is Carme Forcadell, the Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, whom you kindly welcomed to Speaker's House and to our Chamber when she visited us shortly before her detention, Mr Speaker. Her offence, apparently, is to have allowed a parliamentary debate on independence. Yesterday, she was sentenced to 11 and a half years in prison. Mr Speaker, as you confirmed in respect of a point I made some time ago, we would not expect your detention and prosecution were you to allow a debate on Welsh independence. Others jailed include former Vice-President Oriol Junqueras, who was given the harshest sentence of all: 13 years in prison.

Bringing criminal charges is no way to resolve political differences, so will the Government today join calls for the Government of Spain to engage in a proper and respectful process of dialogue with the Government of Catalonia? Will the Secretary of State commit to pressing the relevant EU institutions to consider launching a procedure under article 7 of the treaty on European Union in respect of the Spanish state's response to the Catalan crisis? This would include consideration of the prosecution and sentencing of the Catalan political and civic leaders, as this is a clear example of how Spain is bringing about a risk of serious and persistent breach of the EU's founding values of respect for freedom, democracy, justice and human rights, as outlined in article 2 of the treaty. This is a matter for us and the European Union, and is not just a Spanish domestic matter.

Christopher Pincher: As I said, I appreciate that this is a matter that will drive high passions among our colleagues. I note that Members of the Scottish nationalist party are here in force. I welcome them back from their conference and am sorry that they have had to sojourn for this urgent question. I hope that in the future we will be able to find an accommodation to allow them to have their conference without interference from the activities in this Chamber.

As for the right to debate independence in Spain, I will make two points. First, the Spanish constitution, which was agreed by Spain—including the people of Catalonia—in 1978, makes it quite clear that it is not legally possible to hold a legal secessionist vote without a change to the constitution. Secondly, I fully recognise the rights of the parliamentarians in question to make speeches, to debate and to make their points, and they have done so several times in the regional Parliament of Catalonia, as they have every right to do. They also have the right to elections in that regional Parliament. Those elections were held in 2017, and the people of Catalonia made their choices.

Let me turn to the legal rights of the parliamentarians who have been imprisoned. That is a matter for the Spanish courts, and we would not seek to interfere in those courts, just as I am sure that SNP Members would not seek the Spanish authorities to interfere in the proceedings of the Court of Session in Edinburgh. The parliamentarians we are discussing have a right to appeal to the Spanish constitutional court and to the European Court of Human Rights. Let us see how the law takes its course.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): It is a matter for Spain, but it is also shocking, horrifying and a reminder of a former Spanish regime.

Christopher Pincher: The Spanish courts are transparent and robust, and they have handed down the penalties according to Spanish law. Whether individual Members of Parliament like it or not, that is the Spanish law and it is for the Spanish Government to change it, if the Spanish people wish it.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question and the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for securing it.

As a former lawyer—although I suppose some would say “once a lawyer, always a lawyer”—I am always loth to criticise the courts. I am afraid, though, that what we saw yesterday was the judicial equivalent of what we saw from the Spanish police on the streets of Catalonia two years ago: unnecessary, heavy-handed and entirely counterproductive. In an effort to crush the Catalan independence movement, these incredibly harsh sentences have simply given it fuel. They will serve not just to radicalise what has hitherto been a peaceful pro-independence movement, but to drive many Catalans who were not previously part of that movement to join the cause. As one of the banners carried at yesterday’s protest so pithily put it, “I’m not pro-independence but I’m not an idiot.” That same sentiment will be shared by many—not just in Catalonia, but across Spain—who

see in these sentences a basic injustice being committed, which is unworthy of any nation, let alone a member of the European Union.

But I believe that there is hope, and that hope is the approach being taken by the freshly elected socialist Government in Spain. This is a crisis that they inherited, not one that they created. Even in these court cases, the state prosecutor urged leniency in sentencing. This is reflective of an approach that the Spanish Socialist Workers’ party Government have taken and that Labour—its sister party—supports. That approach is that the only way past this ongoing crisis is through peaceful dialogue and the eventual agreement of a political solution drawn up in accordance with the Spanish constitution. If the answer instead is a further escalation of division and confrontation, the radicalisation of the pro-independence movement and more heavy-handed action by the Spanish police or the Spanish courts, then that is not an answer at all, and all the parties of good will must resist it.

I hear what the Minister says about this being a matter for Spain, but I wonder if he can perhaps help us with this. Given the sentences handed down by the Spanish courts and the ongoing threat that hangs over the former Catalan leader, Carles Puigdemont, can he confirm that that gentleman would be free to visit Britain and speak to supporters, universities, the media and politicians without any risk of being arrested for extradition for Spain?

Mr Speaker: He could speak here. He could come and speak in the Palace of Westminster and would be extremely welcome. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Christopher Pincher: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for reminding us of our rights and the rights of our friends who may choose to come to speak to us in the Palace of Westminster.

I am obliged to the right hon. Lady for her comments and for the reasonable tone in which she undertook them, although I would note that this week she seems to be against the judges whereas a couple of weeks ago she was for the judges. I do not think you can be against the judges one week and for them the next; you need to be for the judges all the time.

Emily Thornberry: I am not against judges. I am married to a judge.

Christopher Pincher: Well, I would not wish to comment on the right hon. Lady’s domestic circumstances. She can do that for herself from a sedentary, if not a supine, position.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the approach that Prime Minister Sánchez has taken. I would echo that. He has called for dialogue—for the use of carrot rather than stick. It is incumbent on all of us, as parliamentarians, to encourage sober and reflective debate on what is an exceptionally passionate topic, not least in Spain, and in Catalonia.

With regard to Mr Puigdemont and his right to travel here, which I think was the substantive point that the right hon. Lady made, any European arrest warrant is a matter for the issuing authority and for the independent

[Christopher Pincher]

agencies in this country—the police, the courts and the prosecuting authorities. It is a convention that I do not propose to break in this case that we do not comment on any arrest warrant until or unless an execution of that warrant is made.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that due process seems to have been followed and that those sentenced received a fair trial?

Christopher Pincher: The legal framework of Spain is a matter for Spain. Its courts, as I said earlier, are open and transparent. Spain has a robust legal infrastructure that allows for right of appeal, and we support its infrastructure.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Gràcies—thank you—Madam Deputy Speaker. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for securing this urgent question.

It is all very well for the Minister to hide behind the constitutionality of what has been done, but could I gently remind him that some of the most unspeakable acts of evil that Europe saw in the 20th century, and that the United States and South Africa have seen, were constitutional and legal? Being constitutional does not make something either legally or morally defensible.

Many of these people are our equivalents. They are Members of Parliament, they are Government Ministers, they are the Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, whose only offence was to seek to implement the mandate they had been given by their people in a free, fair and democratic election. The question is not whether we think that Catalonia should or should not be independent; it is whether we, as parliamentarians, are prepared to stand up and defend the right of parliamentarians across the world to say things that Governments do not like and to implement the policies that their people have put them there to implement without fear of arrest and imprisonment.

Any political system—any constitution—that allows parliamentarians to be arrested for being parliamentarians is a constitution that is not fit for purpose and that needs urgent change. In the case of the constitution of Spain and of Catalonia, the only legitimate vehicle for that constitution to change is through the ballot box. While it is not for us to decide the future of Catalonia, as it is for nobody other than the people of Catalonia to decide that, I stand with the people of Catalonia—*estic amb Catalunya*—in their right to determine their own future and to do so in a free, fair and democratic process.

Does the Minister agree that the right of self-determination and the right to freedom of assembly are fundamental to the concept of modern human rights? Does he accept that sending armed police to break up peaceful demonstrations sets the wrong tone and is likely to inflame the situation rather than to encourage peaceful and legal dialogue? Will he even attempt to persuade the Government of Spain that the way to resolve this crisis is through the democratic political process and not through the criminal justice system? What conversations has he had with his Spanish counterpart, and with his counterparts throughout the

rest of the European Union, to remind them that the founding principle of the European Union is that all peoples have the right of self-determination and that any state that impinges on those rights through the use of force should not be supported by this or any other democratic Government?

Christopher Pincher: The question of whether the referendum in Catalonia was legal is quite clear: it was not legal. It was marked down by the Spanish courts who said that it was illegal. The MPs who decided to use public funds for that illegal referendum knew what they were doing. They knew that they should not have done it. They knew that they were breaking the law. Therefore, they must accept that the law will be done.

In terms of the rights of people to assemble, the rights of people to protest and the way in which police action has occurred in Catalonia, as the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) said, I would encourage great care to be taken in the policing of these events. We, in our own country, know how very important it is to allow people to protest peaceably and then to encourage them to disperse in a similar way, so I would certainly encourage our Spanish friends to do that.

Have I had conversations with the Spanish Government and with the Spanish authorities here? Yes, I have discussed diplomatically with the Spanish ambassador the likely outcome of the court action that we heard of yesterday, and I shall be talking to him again, I am sure, in the next weeks or months.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the regional elections that were held on 21 December provided a path to restoring the rule of law, and that it is for all the people of Catalonia to have their say via democratic processes that are consistent with the constitution as it stands presently?

Christopher Pincher: My hon. Friend is quite right. The elections in December 2017 gave the people of Catalonia the right to exercise their democratic mandate, and they did that. That created a regional Parliament that has debated the questions before Catalonia, including the question of independence, several times. It is for that mechanism, and the mechanism in the Cortes Generales if necessary, to amend the Spanish constitution to allow for legal plebiscites to take place. It is a matter for that procedure and not for illegal procedures which, of course, only cause more harm than good.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister talks about acts that are lawful. We know of many acts in history that have been lawful. I am thinking of the response of the British state to the Easter rising 103 years ago—it might have been lawful, but it can be best described as a massively counterproductive act of repression. Will the Minister urge his Spanish counterparts to at least learn the lessons of history before further inflaming situations and encourage peaceful dialogue and reconciliation?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's question. I think the Spanish Government and Spanish parliamentarians of all stripes and colours will be exceptionally mindful of history. If anybody has

read Antony Beevor's "The Battle for Spain" about the terrible events that took place in Spain between 1936 and 1939, they will understand what can happen when disagreements get out of hand. I am sure that the Spanish Government, the Spanish Opposition and many people in Spain are very mindful of that.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): When the Minister is at the Dispatch Box, he and I will discuss Ukraine fairly often, and we will more often than not find ourselves in agreement, because we have chosen that what happens there is in our interests. If what is happening in Spain and Catalonia now was what Yanukovich's Government had been doing to people in Ukraine back in 2014, the Minister would rightly be condemning it, and I would rightly be saying he was right to do so. Why does he not recognise his unique position as a Minister in a Unionist Government who oversaw an independence referendum that was held legally and fairly, and inject some common sense into his Spanish counterparts?

Christopher Pincher: Self-determination, as set out in international law, is a long-standing convention to which we subscribe, but the circumstances in individual states are often very different. He will know that the situation in Ukraine in 2013-14 was very different from the one in which the people of Spain and Catalonia find themselves today. We should treat individual circumstances individually, and that is what we are doing.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): As other Members have said, this is not about the merits or otherwise of independence for Catalonia. It is about the subjugation of political and civic leaders for pursuing a legitimate cause in a democratic and peaceful manner. That cannot be tolerated. It does not reflect well on Spain—a country I have great affection for—and, frankly, if it were happening in some other parts of the world, the Minister's response would be far more robust.

Christopher Pincher: I understand the passion that the hon. Gentleman brings to his position and his conviction. I will simply repeat that the law of Spain is clear, transparent and robust. Those people who, equally passionately, decided to pursue a secessionist agenda knew that they were breaking Spanish law. The consequences for them were clear, and though he may have his own individual viewpoint about those consequences, the position of this Government is also clear: it is a matter for Spain.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I know that the Minister, like others on the Conservative Benches, values highly freedom of speech. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression are protected under the European convention on human rights. Does he agree with the International Commission of Jurists that these convictions for sedition "represent a serious interference" with freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly, and that the resort to the law of sedition to restrict those important rights is "unnecessary, disproportionate and ultimately unjustifiable"?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for bringing her legal knowledge to bear. That viewpoint is not necessarily the viewpoint of the

Spanish courts. It may be the viewpoint of an international body, and it may be her viewpoint, but it may not be that of international courts. It is for the defendants who have been found guilty by the Supreme Court to appeal, if they so wish, to the Spanish constitutional court, and beyond that to the European Court of Human Rights. Let us see whether they do so and how successful their cases are.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Minister has been remarkably weak in his responses, and I do not think he has noticed that only one Member in this Chamber has asked a question that is sympathetic to what he has said. Will he forget the whole debate about separatism, which is totally different, and talk to the Spanish Government, reflecting the concerns of Members across parties in this House and speaking loudly for what we have said today?

Christopher Pincher: I am sure that the Spanish embassy and the Spanish Government will have heard what individual Members of this House have said. Individual Members can make their views plain, and they have, but as far as it is a matter for Her Majesty's Government, our position is plain: Spanish courts are independent, and their processes are transparent and robust. The court penalties handed down are a matter for those courts, and any change to Spanish law is a matter for Spain.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Minister is at pains to justify the Spanish judicial process, which is interesting when we recall that only last month, the Supreme Court found his Prime Minister to have acted unlawfully. Does he propose that the Spanish rule of law is proportionate, when Speaker Forcadell has been sentenced to 11 and a half years in prison for permitting debate? Does he believe that that is proportionate?

Christopher Pincher: When the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom handed down its verdict last month, we made it plain that we would accept that verdict and obey the law. How can we then say that people in Spain should not obey the laws of Spain? Why should we interfere or comment upon the judicial processes or the penalties handed down by courts in a country that is democratic, robust and open? I do not think we should, and I will not.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): In the four and a half years that I have been a Member of this place, I have never been more ashamed of this so-called bastion of democracy than following this weak response from the Minister. I stand in solidarity with all the political prisoners, because let us be in no doubt: that is what they are. I want to ask the Minister about Jordi Cuixart, a civic leader—a non-politician—who was arrested on trumped-up charges, convicted and now sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, nearly two years to the day since he was held on remand. I have met Jordi's wife and young child, and during that meeting the toddler kept calling out for dad. That child was six months old when Jordi was remanded but will be 11 when he is released. What is the Minister's message for them? They deserve a lot better than these weasel words.

Christopher Pincher: Of course I am sorry—I am sad—if a child is unable to reach out and touch his father and see him, but the hon. Gentleman says that in that particular case, the charges are trumped up. That is his viewpoint. The courts of Spain have decided otherwise. If we are going to be a country that accepts and respects the rule of law, and if we accept that Spain has a robust and transparent legal procedure, we must accept the outcome of those court decisions, however much he or others may personally disagree with them.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that this is a matter for Spain. However, the fact that a European arrest warrant has been issued for the President of Catalonia means that other countries are now involved. Is he confident that the warrant has not been issued merely for political purposes?

Christopher Pincher: I am confident about the robust processes of our own country. As I made clear before, the issuing authority would be in Spain. It is for our independent agencies—the police, the courts and our prosecuting authorities—to decide the merits or otherwise of the warrant, and unless or until one is executed, we should not comment further.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Minister has said repeatedly that it would be inappropriate to comment on the activities of another country's judicial system, but some of us on these Benches find that very difficult to believe, given that unnamed sources in his Government were quite happy to criticise the Scottish courts last month. However, there is a wider issue here. The scenes we saw last night of Spanish police acting with brutality against their own citizens is the kind of thing, if it happened in any other country outside the EU, about which the Minister would be on the phone in diplomatic channels, is it not?

Christopher Pincher: If we believed all the unsourced quotations in all the newspapers we read every day, I think we would be in a pretty pickle. What matters in this country and in this House of Commons is what is said at this Dispatch Box, and it is the view of the British Government that the processes of the Spanish courts are transparent, open and robust. It is incumbent on all of us as democrats and as upholders of the rule of law to accept the outcome of those decisions, however much we may individually dislike or disagree with them.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The imprisonment of legitimately elected parliamentarians does not fit with being a modern European democracy. On that basis, what discussion has the Minister had with the Spanish Government in the past 24 hours regarding a mediated solution to the Catalan crisis, and will the Foreign Secretary take legal advice on pursuing a procedure under article 7 of the EU treaty as a matter of urgency?

Christopher Pincher: I have had no discussions with the Spanish Government in the last 24 hours, but I am always happy to keep in touch with them. I have a very good relationship with the Spanish ambassador, and as events develop perhaps I shall speak to him further.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a hell of a mess in Spain, and it is likely to get worse. That is the fact of the matter. As the SNP Members in front of me know, I was on a different side when it came to the Scottish independence referendum, yet I think it is to the great credit of Scotland and indeed of the colleagues in front of me that we kept it civil and keep it civil today. I am also mindful that Senator Mitchell and General de Chastelain helped to improve—let us put it that way—the peace situation in Northern Ireland. Is it worth the Government considering forming together a party, perhaps of people from the independence movements of Scotland and Wales with those of us who were on the other side, to offer our services to Spain to try to de-escalate an extremely dangerous situation at this stage?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for the tone he has struck. It is a matter for parliamentarians and political parties to offer support to, or indeed to disagree with, other political parties or countries on the continent, but it is not for the British Government to interfere in the legal processes of Spain or the constitutional settlement of Spain. That is a matter for Spain, and Spain alone.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Oppression everywhere has a long history of always being legal. We know that, and that statement was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) earlier. I would like to say to Catalans watching today that, in fact, I was in a debate earlier with a Tory and a Labour politician who support Catalonia, so this is cross-party.

The approach of the European Union has been spineless and shameless. Guy Verhofstadt has made comments on China, Brazil, Turkey and almost anywhere else we could mention, but on Catalonia he is utterly silent. He plays Pontius Pilate, and he cannot get enough bowls of water with which to wash his hands. I am afraid to say that that position seems to be shared by the UK Government. The cry of action is the cry for more bowls of water with which to wash their hands—and this in a Chamber that has just spent an hour telling UEFA and FIFA what to do. No courage at all has been shown in relation to telling the Government in Madrid to behave with a modicum of decency.

I want to ask the Minister: what sort of oppression by Spain in Barcelona or Catalonia will the UK Government tolerate? Forget independence and the fact that Catalonia was annexed in 1716. What level of oppression do they oppose? Is it a Hong Kong level of oppression, a Barcelona level of oppression or being in jail for 14 years? What will they eventually stand up and oppose? The cowardice that has been shown is not on, and the people should not be having to live with it.

Christopher Pincher: I think the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have an occasional drinking friendship, did himself a disservice in the way he has just comported himself. If the situation—the passionate situation—in Catalonia and in its cities is to be de-escalated and the situation is not to be further inflamed, I do not think that commentary such as that helps, frankly. I would call on all parties in Spain—all those who wish to protest and all the agencies that are responsible for

good governance and order in Spain—to treat themselves and each other fairly and soberly so that this particular problem and this great challenge can be dealt with democratically and peaceably within the rule of the Spanish law.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am appalled by some of the words coming out of the Minister today. In Catalonia, people get hit, beaten and forcibly removed from places for simply standing up for their human rights, and this Government refuse to condemn that? I find that inexcusable. *Estic amb Catalunya!*

Christopher Pincher: Of course the British Government deplore any form of oppression, but we also deplore any form of riotous behaviour that undermines the rule of law and threatens public property or public safety. I would encourage all sides to desist, to calm down and to make sure that they address this question, which is a question for Spain, quietly, soberly and peaceably. As far as any support goes, of course the British Government support that.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I have had the incredible privilege of visiting Jordi Cuixart, Jordi Sànchez and Raül Romeva in their prison cells, and they are intelligent, humble and proud men. Everything they have done was peaceful and appropriate. Dr Martin Luther King once said:

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

I refuse to be silent because this matters, while the UK Government’s silence has been deafening. The UK Government like to talk themselves up as a force in the world who think they sit at the top table with the big boys and girls. Well, here is a chance to prove it. Will the Minister—here, today—defend democracy and denounce these prison terms?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I will defend and support the rule of law. I have no doubt that the gentlemen to whom he refers are humble; I have no doubt that they are articulate; I have no doubt that they can make powerful cases in their own defence and in the promulgation of the matters that concern them—

Ronnie Cowan: Peaceably!

Christopher Pincher: And peaceably so. I have no doubt of that, but they must always act and operate within the law. The Spanish legal system, as I have said and will say again, is open, robust and transparent, and it has handed down sentences that, whether we like them or not, we must accept.

I will make the further observation, if I may, that constitutionally Spain cannot of course have a secessionist plebiscite without a change to the constitution. That is in keeping with the constitutions of France and Italy. They are all built in the same way and they are all meant to achieve the same ends, and we have to support them as long as they are in place.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It is quite difficult to sit and listen to the Minister talking about the importance of observing the rule

of law. I wait for him, when he gets back on his feet, to condemn the Leader of the House, sitting beside him on the Bench, who condemned the judges who found against the Government’s breach of the law during Prorogation. Clearly, the sentences that were passed down in Madrid were an act of vengeance, not an act of justice. This is not about independence for Catalonia; this is about the fundamental principles of democracy. Does he not understand that all who believe in democracy have a duty to condemn the kind of repression that we witnessed yesterday; that to say it is a matter for Spain is a complete abdication of the UK’s international responsibility; and that to do nothing is a dereliction of duty, with all the shame that that will bring?

Christopher Pincher: Then who is it a matter for? Is it a matter for this Parliament, this Government, the European Union? Who? The hon. Lady says that Ministers in this Government have criticised judges. She does not seem to appreciate the irony that she is doing exactly the same thing here and now about judges sitting and handing down sentences in Spain, a country that is democratic, has a robust legal system, and adheres to the rule of law. That is all that we are doing in this House right now. We are supporting the rule of law and the right of the Spanish courts to hand down justice as they see it to be right.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Is it not the case, Minister, that any country that seeks to perpetrate a human rights abuse will claim that its legal systems are robust, and that it is happening under the rule of law? What criteria do his Government place on speaking out when free speech is challenged in this way?

Christopher Pincher: The people of Catalonia have the right to freedom of expression through the ballot box in the regional Parliament, which they have done. The Catalanian parliamentarians have the right to freedom of expression when they debate the question of independence, which they have done, so I do not really see why the hon. Gentleman is making the argument that he is. They have a right in the Spanish Parliament, and in the Catalanian Parliament, to speak, to debate and to be heard, but they must do that within the rule of law, which the Spanish courts have decided they have not.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): As a younger woman in my 20s I visited Catalonia as part of a European Free Alliance Scottish delegation, where I met and worked with many young Catalan activists and leaders who wanted one thing—to decide their own future in a democratic and legal way. Whatever his views on independence for Catalonia or any other country around the world, surely the Minister agrees with the right to self-determination and of citizens to decide the future path of their nation and people. The Minister has an opportunity to redeem himself. Does he agree with that right and that it cannot be right for any political differences to be solved by police brutality and incarceration?

Christopher Pincher: I certainly agree that people have the right to self-determination, but they must pursue it within the law. In the case of Spain, that

[Christopher Pincher]

requires a change to the Spanish constitution and it is for Spain to change its constitution, not for this Parliament or the British Government.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I and many others are dismayed at the complacency that the Minister has shown at the jailing of elected politicians for up to 13 years for simply organising a referendum. If this had been a regime anywhere else in the world that was renowned for oppressing democracy, the United Kingdom rightly would have been at the head of the queue to condemn that regime. Just because it is Spain does not make this any less wrong. No reasonable person could look at the sentences and say that they were not excessive, punitive, disproportionate and vindictive. If the Minister cannot bring himself to condemn them legally, will he at least condemn these sentences morally?

Christopher Pincher: I am rather dismayed at the rather liberal way in which the hon. Gentleman casts aside the rule of law and due process. It is for individual Members of Parliament to decide whether they agree or disagree with the sentences handed down by the Spanish courts. They may have a view on whether the defendants should appeal or not, but for the British Government this is a matter for Spain. It is for the Spanish courts to hand down the laws of Spain and for the Spanish Parliament, as expressed through the Spanish people, to decide whether they wish to change the Spanish constitution.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have worn yellow pretty consistently in this Chamber for the past two years, not just because I like the colour—it is the colour of my party—but in solidarity with the people of Catalonia. How can the Minister defend a regime that jails political opponents, cracks the heads of those who want to cast a democratic vote and is running scared of the political symbolism of the colour yellow?

Christopher Pincher: With all due respect, I disagree with the hon. Lady's characterisation of the Government of Mr Sánchez as a regime. The Government of Mr Sánchez have attempted dialogue with the Catalan independence movements and parties. He has attempted

to sensibly bring this question to a peaceful and equitable conclusion. He is also of course in the middle of an election, to be decided on 10 November, so I do not agree with this categorisation of Spain as a regime. As I have said before—I am sorry if I have to repeat it—these legal matters are for the Spanish courts. The constitutional settlement in Spain is a matter for the Spanish Parliament, and ultimately for the Spanish people. Unless they wish to change their laws, nothing is going to change, but those changes are a matter for them and not for the British Government.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The prize for patience and perseverance goes to Tommy Sheppard.

Tommy Sheppard: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. To be clear, the question before us today is not whether we support Catalan independence. It is not even whether an offence was committed under the Spanish constitution. The question is what we think about the jail terms that were issued yesterday to elected politicians. I know what I think. I think that they were barbaric and outrageous and that they diminish how people perceive Spain in the world. I already know of several friends who were planning to visit Spain next year on holiday who are now making alternative arrangements. The question to the Minister is not whether he wants to interfere in internal Spanish matters. The question is what he thinks about it. What do his Government think about it? What relationship will change as a result of what has happened? It is not good enough, Minister, to sit there and say nothing and do nothing. [*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is getting a little bit noisy, and we ought to hear the Minister's final answer.

Christopher Pincher: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman, with his usual pugnacity, asks what we think of Spanish judges and the sentences that they have handed down. I would gently say that if we start questioning what judges hand down, and if we think that we can think better than them and interfere in their right to hand down justice, as prescribed by their Parliament and their laws, we set in train the sort of barbarity that he was criticising.

Business Statement

2.8 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): Madam Deputy Speaker, with permission, I should like to make a short announcement regarding additional business for consideration tomorrow.

At the conclusion of tomorrow's debate on the Loyal Address, the House will be asked to consider a motion under section 3(2) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation Etc) Act 2019. This is a requirement under that Act. I shall make a further statement announcing future business in the usual way on Thursday.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for his courtesy in making this statement. He rightly has a reputation for being courteous, but the report to which tomorrow's debate refers is not available and has not been available in the Vote Office. Can he make sure that that is attended to as a matter of emergency so that Members from all parties can know what exactly we will be debating tomorrow? He will accept that that is a matter of fundamental importance.

May I also suggest that the right hon. Gentleman make inquiries as to why the report is not with us at this stage? I spent several hours today trying to find out what this debate might or might not be about. I look forward to the debate tomorrow.

The Leader of the House will be aware that for many of our colleagues, particularly those with childcare responsibilities, the uncertainty over whether we will meet on Saturday is really not tolerable. Will he now give a definitive statement, on behalf of the Government, on whether they intend to go ahead with the Saturday sitting, and whether appropriate arrangements have been made for all our colleagues who will have to make real efforts to ensure they are with us on Saturday?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The report was meant to have been laid on 14 October, so I can only apologise if it is not in the Vote Office. That will be looked into immediately after I have sat down. With regard to Saturday, the issue there is that a Saturday sitting is an extremely unusual process dependent upon events, but the events that may require a Saturday sitting have not yet reached their fruition. It is only after that point has been reached that it would be sensible to confirm what exactly will be happening on Saturday, but of course it will be my aim to bring an announcement to the House as soon as possible in that regard.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I did not intend to intervene on the Leader of the House until the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) asked his question about Saturday. It might just be worth drawing this point to his attention, because he does raise some perfectly understandable diary uncertainty. The challenge around the Saturday sitting was really put in train by all those Members of the House who voted for the surrender Act. It is the deadline in that Act, Saturday 19 October, which would potentially necessitate the sitting of this House on that day, so if he has diary concerns, he should really look in the mirror.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend makes an absolutely valid point. It was of course the surrender Act that set the date of 19 October for its coming into

force and that is why events may have to take place on Saturday. I hope that Members of the House will be reassured that the House has met on a Saturday in 1956 and 1982. We are Members of Parliament. It is our duty to attend to the serious business of the state, as we had set out to us by Her Majesty only yesterday, and to meet twice or three times on a Saturday in 70 years is not too inconvenient, even for those with the most pressing diary concerns.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for making this short statement this afternoon. It is disappointing that we are still in the realms of "surrender Act". For goodness' sake, let us try to see if we can improve the language used in this House. Using terms like that is singularly inappropriate and I believe it does not catch the mood of the House at all.

The Leader of the House made his statement with all the enthusiasm of a prime ministerial speech at a People's Vote rally. The last thing that he wants to bring to the House are the constraints that were given to this Government under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. We did that because we wanted to ensure we did not have the situation where they could possibly have their no-deal scenario. Thank goodness we have this extra piece of security at our disposal to ensure that the Government have to continue to come to Parliament every week to give some sort of statement. We are grateful for that.

I agree with the concerns of the Labour spokesperson. We need to see more about the proposed motion. It is just not good enough to glibly say, "Sorry, it's not available." This should have been available to us. How many hours have been set aside for this tomorrow? We are halfway through the Queen's Speech debate and this is now going to be included. Will it disrupt the business of debating the Queen's Speech? How long will we get to debate it? I also share the concerns about Saturday. We need to hear what is happening on Saturday. We need to have some sort of plan. We are from Scotland, Leader of the House. You have already destroyed our conference. We are all here missing our leader's speech today. We are possibly going to have to come back. We do not know what we are going to be doing. Give us some certainty and security. *[Interruption.]* If he is going to say to me—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I did not hear what the hon. Gentleman said at the end of his question and I guess that lots of other people did not either. I am therefore going to ask him to repeat it and the House ought to listen to the last bit of his question.

Pete Wishart: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am tempted to start from the very beginning of my remarks, because they have been met with such enthusiasm by colleagues across the Floor. Is it not ridiculous? All we are saying is give us a bit of certainty and Government Members are trying to shout me down. What an appalling thing to do. It just shows us how bad and febrile this House has become. It is a very legitimate question: when will we secure certainty about the weekend? If it is all about events, will he tell us that they will be concluded by Saturday so we can sit? Come on, tell us what is happening. When will we hear what is going on and how long will we be sitting tomorrow night?

Mr Rees-Mogg: With regard to language, I have just been called pot by Mr Kettle, so I do not think I will worry about that unduly. With regard to the motion that I have announced to take place tomorrow, the hon. Gentleman is a very well-established Member of this House and he will know that it is a proceeding under an Act. Proceedings under an Act under Standing Orders are subject to 90-minute debates and they are allowed to come on after the moment of conclusion of the House.

On the Saturday sitting, I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said earlier. Sittings on Saturday are highly abnormal. To have inconvenience three times in 70 years is not unreasonable and it will only happen if we have to have something, subject to what goes on in the European Council, to debate on Saturday. I think Members putting their duty to the House first, as we all try to do, do not find that an unreasonable or insupportable burden.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Was the Leader of the House as uncomfortable as I was a few moments ago to be surrounded by advocates and apologists for the Spanish judiciary, when some of our own are not that good? Perhaps we could debate that on Saturday.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I entered the record books for Parliament when I said that while no one was allowed to indulge in the floccinaucinihilipilification of our own judges, one was allowed to do so under Standing Orders and “Erskine May” for foreign judges. That is a freedom that this House is entitled to.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): The provisions of the Benn Act, or, as it could also be known, the safeguarding Act, do not actually require a sitting on Saturday. It is a bit peculiar about what exactly the Government are planning. I do not necessarily expect the Leader of the House to tell us what will be brought forward on Saturday, but I do think it would be very helpful if he would publish the motion he proposes to use to facilitate the Saturday sitting. Will it be voted on tomorrow night or on Thursday night? Will it be sprung on us and introduced midway through Thursday? A lot of us do not, quite frankly, trust the Government on the way that they will frame the sitting on Saturday, so I hope he will publish it in advance for us all to see and scrutinise.

Mr Rees-Mogg: This depends upon events, as I have already said.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Leader of the House said, correctly, a moment ago that the Saturday sitting will depend on events. The European Council is scheduled for Thursday and Friday, and the events to which he refers may come late on Friday evening. I have a very practical question: how does he propose to inform the House whether we are sitting at 9.30 the following morning?

Mr Rees-Mogg: If the right hon. Gentleman had not set a foolish date in his surrender Act, there would not be this problem.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Leader of the House will no doubt be aware that on Saturday there will probably be a million-plus people in

London marching for a people’s vote. Will he arrange the sitting in such a way that Members of Parliament whose constituents may want to lobby them on the issue of a people’s vote can be made available for that purpose?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am not entirely sure about the counting ability of Liberal Democrats, but it is always a right of members of the public to lobby MPs when the House is sitting. It is one we should be very proud of.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The UK Parliament has an international reputation for hardly being able to run a bath as run a Brexit. Today is Tuesday and the UK Parliament cannot tell us if we are sitting on Saturday. This will be Brexit Saturday if we sit. Brexit Saturday will be in the company of world war two Saturday, Suez Saturday and Falklands Saturday. This calamity that the Leader of the House wants to visit on the country is not in the best of company. What will happen between now and Thursday that might be able to clear his mind up as to whether we are sitting on Saturday? Decide, man! Decide!

Mr Rees-Mogg: I always thought one was in the habit of drawing a bath, rather than running a bath, and I am sure that the House would be most capable of drawing a bath. To come to the hon. Gentleman’s main point, we are waiting upon events. There is a European Council taking place on Thursday and Friday upon which the events on Saturday will depend. It seems to be relatively—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Today is Tuesday.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman heckles, elegantly and loudly as always, saying that today is Tuesday—I know today is Tuesday, and it will be followed by Wednesday and a European Council on Thursday and Friday. Things will be decided at that Council that will allow us to decide whether we need to meet on Saturday.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The right hon. Gentleman is correct to mention heckling going on. Obviously, I will not allow heckling. I did not recognise heckling there—a statement of the obvious, yes, but not quite heckling. If it gets any worse, it will be heckling and I will have to stop it.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): Will the Leader of the House confirm that there is no provision anywhere in the Act of Parliament that we recently passed—now called, quite properly, the Benn Act or the safeguarding Act—that says that this House must meet on Saturday 19 October? If there is, will he tell us which clause or subsection that requirement is in?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thought that in my previous answer, I was pointing out the blindingly obvious to one hon. Member. I shall now do so to a right hon. Member: the Act sets the 19th as the deadline for certain things and votes to take place. Saturday is the 19th. Otherwise, consequences follow from that Act. It seems to me extraordinarily obvious.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I should point out that this is a very narrow business statement, and technically, I should have allowed questions relating only specifically to that, but I hope that the Lord President of the

Council will forgive me for having allowed slightly wider questioning. I appreciate that there is concern about a Saturday sitting and that Members had genuine questions to ask him, which he has answered with his usual courtesy.

Points of Order

2.22 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for the record to state that there is nothing in the Benn Act that says that any votes—I am sure that the Leader of the House did not mean to mislead or be in any way inaccurate—have to take place at any time? It mentions nothing more than a letter that must be sent seeking an extension.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the right hon. Lady for her point of order. As I said, I allowed considerable leniency in the business statement and questioning thereafter, because I recognise that Members have genuine questions to ask. She did not really ask a question of the Chair. She made a very reasonable, genuine point of debate, which I am sure she will be able to make again and again as time goes on—possibly even on Saturday.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have perused the Act very carefully. It is very clear that it reflects the events of the European Council on Thursday and Friday, and then sets out a number of things that have to take place, consequent or otherwise on a decision of this House. Given the dates of the European Council, those decisions can take place only on Saturday.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which was more of a point of information. I am sure that the matter will be further debated in—*[Interruption.]* A right hon. Member says “disinformation”. It is my job simply to facilitate the discussion as to whether a matter is information or disinformation. Members are of course entitled to their opinions, which I know they will have the opportunity to express in full in due course.

BILLS PRESENTED

ANIMAL WELFARE (SENTENCING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Theresa Villiers, supported by the Prime Minister and Zac Goldsmith, presented a Bill to make provision about the mode of trial and maximum penalty for certain offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1- EN).

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Orders Nos. 57 and 80A)

Secretary Priti Patel, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Robert Buckland, Secretary Robert Jenrick, Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Secretary Julian Smith, the Attorney General, Victoria Atkins and Wendy Morton, presented a Bill to make provision in relation to domestic abuse; to make provision for and in connection with the establishment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; to prohibit cross-examination in person in family proceedings in certain circumstances; to make provision about certain violent

or sexual offences, and offences involving other abusive behaviour, committed outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the first and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 2 October); to be committed to a Public Bill Committee, and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).

ENVIRONMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Theresa Villiers, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Stephen Barclay, Secretary Grant Shapps, Secretary Alistair Jack, Secretary Alun Cairns, Secretary Julian Smith, Zac Goldsmith and Rebecca Pow, presented a Bill to make provision about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; to make provision for the Office for Environmental Protection; to make provision about waste and resource efficiency; to make provision about air quality; to make provision for the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards; to make provision about water; to make provision about nature and biodiversity; to make provision for conservation covenants; to make provision about the regulation of chemicals; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).

PRISONERS (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ABOUT VICTIMS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Robert Buckland, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary Nicky Morgan, the Attorney General, Lucy Frazer, Wendy Morton, Victoria Atkins and Chris Philp, presented a Bill to require the Parole Board to take into account any failure by a prisoner serving a sentence for unlawful killing or for taking or making an indecent image of a child to disclose information about the victim.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): For the avoidance of doubt, I should explain that this is a matter of procedure and Standing Orders. It does not mean that these Bills will necessarily have a Second Reading debate in the House tomorrow, but it is required that they are introduced in this way. I hope to avoid points of order on this matter by giving the explanation now.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE (LEASEHOLD PROPERTY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Nicky Morgan, supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Robert Jenrick, Rishi Sunak, Jesse Norman, John Glen, Nigel Adams, Helen Whately and Matt Warman, presented a Bill to amend the electronic communications code set out in Schedule 3A to the Communications Act 2003; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 5), with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Grant Shapps, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Matt Hancock, Paul Maynard and Ms Nusrat Ghani, presented a Bill to make provision for a railway between a junction with Phase One of High Speed 2, near Fradley Wood in Staffordshire, and a junction with the West Coast Main Line near Crewe in Cheshire; and for connected purposes.

Bill deemed to have been read the First, Second and Third time (Order, 30 January 2018), and to be printed (Bill 6).

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AIR QUALITY)

That the draft Environment (Legislative Functions from Directives) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 6 June 2019, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(David Rutley.)

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 204.

Division No. 1]

[2.26 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Burns, rh Conor
Afolami, Bim	Burt, rh Alistair
Afriyie, Adam	Cairns, rh Alun
Aldous, Peter	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Amess, Sir David	Cartlidge, James
Argar, Edward	Cash, Sir William
Atkins, Victoria	Caulfield, Maria
Austin, Ian	Chalk, Alex
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi (Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty)	Chishti, Rehman
Baker, Mr Steve	Chope, Sir Christopher
Baldwin, Harriett	Churchill, Jo
Baron, Mr John	Clark, Colin
Bebb, Guto	Clark, rh Greg
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Clarke, Mr Simon
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cleverly, rh James
Berry, rh Jake	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Blackman, Bob	Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Blunt, Crispin	Collins, Damian
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Costa, Alberto
Bowie, Andrew	Courts, Robert
Bradley, Ben	Crabb, rh Stephen
Bradley, rh Karen	Davies, David T. C.
Brady, Sir Graham	Davies, Glyn
Braverman, Suella (Proxy vote cast by Mr Steve Baker)	Davies, Mims
Brereton, Jack	Davis, rh Mr David
Bridgen, Andrew	Dinenage, Caroline
Brine, Steve	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Brokenshire, rh James	Docherty, Leo
Bruce, Fiona	Dodds, rh Nigel
Buckland, rh Robert	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Burghart, Alex	Donelan, Michelle
	Dorries, Ms Nadine
	Double, Steve

Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, rh Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hollingbery, Sir George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, rh Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Sir David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil (*Proxy vote cast by Bim Afolami*)
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike

Penrose, John
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Stuart Andrew and
 Mike Freer**

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen

Forbes, Lisa
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Glindon, Mary
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike

Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica

Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy

Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Snell, Gareth
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Phil
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Thangam Debbonaire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 14 October).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Britain's Place in the World

2.42 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): It is indeed an honour to open the debate.

We live in the best country in the world: a country that leads on the world stage, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and in NATO, the G7, the G20 and, of course, the Commonwealth. Ours is the only major country that is simultaneously meeting the NATO target of spending 2% of our GDP on defence and the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on international development. We should be proud of meeting both those targets, and of maintaining our security while supporting some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. They are targets that this Government, under the Prime Minister, will continue to honour, and they are targets that are possible only with a strong economy.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out a very positive agenda for government—a positive vision of what we can achieve, working together and delivering on the priorities of people throughout the United Kingdom—but if we are to move forward, we must first get Brexit done.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As the Secretary of State has just said, those are the priorities of people throughout the United Kingdom, but studies in Scotland have shown that the place that will be most adversely affected by Brexit is my constituency. With what direct money—what quantity—will the UK Government compensate the people of Na h-Eileanan an Iar for their political project, Brexit, given that those people will suffer the worst effects of it?

Alok Sharma: I have to say that the hon. Gentleman is always incredibly negative about the future of the country. I wish that he would be more positive. I wish that he would actually support the Union. He wants to break up our country, and we on the Conservative Benches do not want that.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has talked about the importance of the United Kingdom's helping and engaging with third world countries. Does he agree that when we pull out of the European Union, we will be able to give Commonwealth and third world countries much greater access to our marketplace than the current protectionist racket of the European Union?

Alok Sharma: Indeed, and I will come on to that, but, of course, once we are out of the European Union we will be able to set our own trade policy.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Let me be as positive as my right hon. Friend about our place in the world. This Government have made a big effort to encourage investment from Israel, and to encourage bilateral treaties with it. What will happen about that in the future, and how will we take it forward?

Alok Sharma: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he does as a trade envoy in Africa. He has talked about trade deals in the future. We are, of course, having relentlessly positive discussions about those, but, as I have said, we must first make sure that we get Brexit done before we move on to the next stage of this agenda.

I campaigned to remain in the European Union, but ahead of the vote I said that I would respect the outcome of the national referendum, and in 2017, along with the vast majority of Members, I stood on a manifesto to deliver on that outcome. Well, it is high time we honoured that promise to respect the vote to leave. We must get Brexit done. We do want to leave the European Union with a deal, and that is why we have set out our fair and reasonable proposals. I believe that, should we get a deal, it is the responsibility of the whole House to deliver Brexit without further delay.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): May I point out that I stood on a manifesto promising to fight for a second referendum, a referendum on the deal, so that the people could have the final say on whatever is stitched up in the vape-filled rooms in Brussels and London? May I also point out that in the Lake District, where we have a marvellous export—our tourism industry—one in three of the staff on whom we rely are from overseas, most of them from the EU, and the Government's proposal to introduce a £30,000 salary floor for those people would decimate our tourism industry? Will the right hon. Gentleman sort that out before he causes such enormous harm to such an important part of our economy?

Alok Sharma: We are, of course introducing an immigration Bill, which will focus on a points-based system to ensure that people who come here have the skills that the country requires. Let me also say to the hon. Gentleman that he calls himself a Liberal Democrat, but his policy is illiberal and anti-democratic.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): In my constituency, 73% of people voted to leave. They did not directly express how they wanted to leave, but what I hear day after day is that we must leave, and we must leave on the 31st. I know that there are people who are concerned about a no-deal Brexit, but the best way to avoid a no-deal Brexit is to support a deal in the House, so that we can all leave with some degree of security.

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What should be happening is that we should be coming together, but I must tell Opposition Members that we could have left the European Union by now if they had only supported the previous deal. *[Interruption.]*

[Alok Sharma]

They did not do that. They did not do that, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are the ones who put jobs, the economy and business at risk because they did not support the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Alok Sharma: I want to continue.

When we leave the EU, there will be opportunities across the world. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, this Conservative Government will ensure that the United Kingdom continues to play a leading role in global affairs, defending our interests, promoting our values, and seizing those opportunities.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Countries around the world are judged according to the values for which they stand, and the United Kingdom always advocates for democracy around the world. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we do not deliver on the mandate that the public gave us in 2016, it will be completely and utterly wrong and will undermine our democratic process? Does he agree that we should therefore leave on 31 October with a deal, or, if that is not possible, without a deal?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Unfortunately, what has happened over the last few months—after we did not leave at the end of March—has indeed been a sapping of trust in democratic processes across our country, and that is why we must leave on 31 October.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Minister has talked about a no-deal Brexit. In evidence to the Brexit Committee the representative of the Ulster Farmers Union, when asked what a no-deal Brexit would mean for his industry, replied that it would be “catastrophic”. Would the Minister like to explain to farmers in Northern Ireland, and everyone else who would be affected, why it is the Government’s policy if there is not a deal that that catastrophe should be inflicted upon the farmers of a part of the United Kingdom?

Alok Sharma: I have a lot of respect for the right hon. Gentleman so I am sorry to have to say this to him, but the Bill that he brought forward, which we refer to as the surrender Act now—I know other colleagues would refer to it differently—reduced the negotiating position of the Government. Our policy still is a preference for a deal, but he must take his share of responsibility if we end up with no deal on 31 October.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Alok Sharma: No, I will not; let me make some more progress.

I was talking about the opportunities that we will have outside the European Union, and of course there will be opportunities that will boost British businesses with strong trading relationships with countries around the world, championing free trade.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Minister talks about future opportunities for businesses. Rightly, this Parliament requires our businesses to observe very high standards of animal welfare, environmental regulations and workplace regulations. Will he make sure that future trade agreements do not undermine our competitiveness against imports from other jurisdictions that do not have to observe such high standards?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and as he will have seen in the Queen’s Speech and indeed the speech the Prime Minister made yesterday, environmental issues are very much at the top of the Government’s agenda.

Talking about the opportunities we have, in January our country will host Governments from across Africa here in London for the UK-Africa investment summit. The summit will bring together businesses, Governments and international institutions to encourage investment in Africa. This will also create opportunities for the City of London.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): To state the obvious, Britain leaving the EU will decrease our influence in the world, not increase it. Seven of the countries with a seat at the table in Brussels this week have a population that is smaller than that of Wales, yet they will have greater influence over the future of Europe than the UK might have. Does the Minister not agree that Wales therefore will be better placed in the world with our own seat at the table, rather than in this Union of unequals?

Alok Sharma: First, may I just say that we are determined to respect the outcome of the referendum? Indeed, colleagues across the House, including some who now argue against it, at the time said this was a once-in-a-generation vote. Well, let’s get together; let’s respect the outcome of the referendum. And I have to say to the right hon. Lady that I wish she was a bit more positive about our future as a country. I have outlined the fact that we lead the world in very many institutions; that will absolutely continue, and I hope that she will find that she is able to be a little bit more positive about our future.

The right hon. Lady may recall that in the aftermath of the vote to leave many people said that the economy would turn down and we would lose jobs. That is not what has happened: the economy has stayed strong; employment is at record levels.

In DFID, our ultimate goal in tackling poverty is to support countries to help themselves and meet the sustainable development goals, to become economically self-sustaining and our trading partners of the future. I want developing countries to trade their way out of needing aid.

Of course the shadow Chancellor sees business as the enemy; that is his stated position. We do not; we see it as an enabler. The private sector has had the biggest impact in tackling poverty in the developing world in the last 100 years, and this Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) said, are relentlessly pursuing free trade agreements; these will benefit businesses and consumers in Britain and in the developing world.

Governments around the world collectively spend around \$140 billion every year on aid. However, the United Nations estimates that an additional \$2.5 trillion

is required annually in developing countries to meet the sustainable development goals. That investment gap needs to be met largely by the private sector. That is why I have established an International Development Infrastructure Commission to advise on how we can mobilise additional private sector funds.

But global Britain is about more than Brexit or free trade; it is also about the role we have to play in tackling some of the biggest issues facing our world.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): If we are going to be great again and set an example to these other countries and help them, we need to be a healthy nation across the country, so what are the Government going to do about addressing health inequalities in our own nation—and perhaps deliver the hospital for Stockton in my constituency that was taken away by the Liberal Democrat-Tory Government in 2010?

Alok Sharma: We have record investment going into the NHS. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced investments in hospitals, and I say to the hon. Gentleman that whether for aid or the public services the only way we can find that money is to keep our economy strong—something that would not happen under the Labour party.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met leaders at the G7 this summer in Biarritz; all those countries support the UK's campaign to give every girl in the world 12 years of quality education.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Britain can be proud of its global record of development. Will the Minister encourage some other European countries to step up and match Britain's international aid commitment? Countries including France and many others only contribute about half the national wealth that this country does, and they can learn a lot from global Britain.

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and of course we urge all developed nations to come forward and match us in our 0.7% target. I would add that there are certain areas such as the fight against the spread of Ebola where the UK has been leading, and it would be very helpful if some of our international partners came alongside us in such endeavours.

As I have said, all those countries in Biarritz supported the UK's campaign to ensure that every girl in the world receives 12 years of quality education, and we know that educating girls is the tool that can address a whole host of the world's economic and social problems. Educating girls prevents child marriage and early pregnancy, helps women into the workforce and boosts household incomes and economic growth. We announced new funding at the G7 to provide education for children in the developing world caught up in crises and conflict; girls, who are more than twice as likely to be out of school in conflict areas, stand to benefit most from this support.

Since 2015, the UK has supported almost 6 million girls to gain a decent education. At the UN in September, the Prime Minister announced measures that will help to get over 12 million more children into school. That will boost future economic growth and improve women's rights in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I was listening very carefully when the Minister was talking about the importance of being positive about Brexit because the Institute for Fiscal Studies said last week that the UK is £60 billion worse off already as a result of Brexit, and we have not left yet, and it also said that the UK economy is now 2.5% to 3% smaller than it would be had the Brexit process not been started. Importantly for me, as I am sure the Minister will understand, 21% of my constituents in North Ayrshire are assessed as being vulnerable to the Brexit shock. What advice does the Minister have for the 21% of people in North Ayrshire who will be adversely affected?

Alok Sharma: I do not think the hon. Lady was in the House in 2010 when we had an emergency Budget to deal with the economic mess we were left by the Labour party. I remember that in those debates, the Opposition told us that a million jobs would be lost as a result of the policies we were putting in place. Almost 10 years on, there are more than 3 million extra jobs in the economy, wages are outpacing inflation and we are seeing growth in the economy year after year. If she wants to avoid the uncertainty of no deal, why did she not support previous deals? Will she commit to supporting a deal if one comes back from the European Council?

Perhaps I can move to another topic that we lead the world in tackling—namely, climate change. We were the first major economy to legislate for net zero, and at the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister doubled our support to help developing countries to tackle climate change. Climate change is not a problem created in the developing world, but the world's poorest will be hit hardest by it and we have a responsibility to act. Some weeks ago, we saw the catastrophic effects of climate change in the Bahamas. The first responders on the ground saw the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian and described the scenes as “apocalyptic”, with roofs ripped from buildings, homes under water and families left devastated by the loss of their loved ones. I am proud that our armed forces, supported by DFID and FCO expertise, led the British response. This was a joint global-British response to a natural disaster.

Sadly, disasters like these will become all the more common. Almost 1 million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction with floods, droughts and storms becoming increasingly frequent. Each one pushes yet more people into poverty. We cannot ignore this global threat. The Bills announced by the Prime Minister yesterday will continue the word-leading efforts that this Conservative Government have taken to protect our environment. Our new Environment Bill will guide our country towards a cleaner and greener future. Under the Conservatives, we will continue to proudly lead the world in this area.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What are the Government doing to stop fracking on a global scale?

Alok Sharma: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not listen to me when I talked about the fact that we were doubling our commitment in terms of international climate finance. An enormous amount of work is going on in this area, and more will be set out. I would have thought that these are the areas he should be praising the Government on. This is somewhere where we have a

[Alok Sharma]

joint and common endeavour. I wish that Opposition Members would occasionally be positive about what the Government are doing and what we are achieving in the developing world to help the poorest people across the globe.

It is not just on climate change and education that global Britain is leading the way. The senseless injustice of preventable deaths must end. Last week in Lyon, I announced more details of our pledge to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. AIDS is the biggest killer of women aged 15 to 49 globally. Our commitment to tackle these deadly diseases is a vital part of this Conservative Government's decision to ramp up efforts to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children in the poorest parts of the world by 2030. We are investing in British expertise, and we work with the international community to ensure that, wherever somebody is born, they have access to the vital health services they need. That must include sexual and reproductive health and rights for women. That is why, at the UN General Assembly, I announced a package that will help 20 million women and girls to gain access to family planning each year up to 2025.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): A few minutes ago, the Minister mentioned the vital role of our armed forces in doing good works around the world, and all of us of a right mind here support our armed forces. As the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (James Gray) and for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) know, Mr Vladimir Putin is not about the good of the UK; he is not our friend. In tackling the Salisbury situation, the co-operation of our EU friends was crucial. Is it not an incontrovertible truth that pulling out of our membership of the EU will make the task of our armed forces that much more difficult?

Alok Sharma: No, I do not believe that is the case. Of course, we will continue to co-operate with our friends around the world, and of course we will continue to play a leading part in NATO.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I am pleased to hear what my right hon. Friend says he is doing for women and girls around the world. Can he confirm that the Government will also be looking at spending more and raising the profile of female genital mutilation, both here and abroad, and also of female education, particularly at primary level?

Alok Sharma: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, who did such good work during his time at the Foreign Office tackling precisely these issues. Of course we will continue to work on supporting initiatives in these areas.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Alok Sharma: If I may just continue, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman.

Our country is leading the world in tackling some of the greatest challenges facing our planet today, whether in dealing with natural disasters or with the fallout from

humanitarian crises around the world. We only have to look at the support we have provided to people fleeing Venezuela. We do not stand idly by while the Maduro regime brutalises its people. The leader of the Labour party may celebrate the achievement of that despotic ruler, seeing it perhaps as his blueprint for Britain, but we do not—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) suggests that what I am saying is inaccurate—

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): It's bollocks.

Hon. Members: Outrageous!

Alok Sharma: Perhaps—

Sir Hugo Swire: And sexist, by definition!

Mr Speaker: Order. I did not hear the word, but if the word used was that which has just been put to me, it was tasteless. [*Interruption.*] I know that the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) means well, but I am not sure that I regard him as a great arbiter on these important matters, although he may be starting to negotiate the learning curve. I am sure he is well intentioned and trying his best.

Alok Sharma: Irrespective of whether or not that comment was offensive, may I just enlighten the right hon. Lady on what her leader said at a Solidarity with Venezuela event in 2015? This is what the Leader of the Opposition said:

“When we celebrate, and it is a cause—”

Emily Thornberry: That was four years ago.

Alok Sharma: If the right hon. Lady would only listen. The Leader of the Opposition said:

“When we celebrate, and it is a cause for celebration, the achievements of Venezuela, in jobs, in housing, in health, in education, but above all its role in the whole world as a completely different place, then we do that because we recognise what they have achieved.”

My goodness, if that is a sort of achievement we are going to have under a Labour Government, it is pretty clear that they should not be let anywhere near Downing Street.

Let me go back to the Venezuela of today. Its economy has collapsed, public services have collapsed and the very being of the country is on life support. I am very proud to say that it is Britain that has stepped forward to provide life-saving humanitarian support to millions of Venezuelans. Last month, I announced an aid package that will deliver life-saving medicines and clean water to those suffering from this dire crisis, quite simply because it is the right thing to do.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend is talking about a humanitarian crisis. A few weeks ago, a large group of us were in Bangladesh where we witnessed the plight of the Rohingya. I know that his Department has announced more money to assist the Rohingya. What further efforts is the Department going to make to lessen the plight of the Rohingya and enable them to return home to a safe environment?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. That major humanitarian crisis has been caused by the military in Myanmar. We have announced further funds of about £87 million to provide food, healthcare and shelter, and that support will help to reach over 1 million refugees but also, importantly, host community members. Of course I commend the Bangladesh Government for the support that they are providing for relocations, but we are very clear that we agree with the assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that conditions are not yet in place to allow safe and sustainable returns to Rakhine state.

Tim Farron: Will the Minister give way?

Alok Sharma: I will not, because I am now going to wind up. I spent a year as a Foreign Office Minister, and I have now spent around three months in my current role. As I have gone around the world, I have seen and heard for myself how highly regarded our country is. We are respected for our values, for our support for democracy and the rules-based international system and for championing economic empowerment across the world. When the United Kingdom speaks, the world listens. I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

Debate interrupted.

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before I call the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, I have a very short statement to make. Having secured the necessary formal royal approval, I am very pleased to announce to the House the appointment of our new Serjeant at Arms, Ugbana Oyet. Ugbana is well known already to many Members of the House because of his role as Parliament's principal electrical engineer and as programme director for the £143 million estate-wide engineering, infrastructure and resilience programme, which aims to make the parliamentary estate carbon-neutral by 2050. A chartered engineer and fellow of the Institute of Engineering and Technology, Ugbana has a strong track record of delivering multi-billion-pound projects, from a £1.8 billion village complex and gated community in Abu Dhabi—in time for the first grand prix there in 2009—to a new city in Saudi Arabia, including a power station and desalination plant, worth tens of billions of pounds.

Born in Nigeria, Ugbana moved to the UK with his family in 1991 and was at school in Chichester when he met Claire, his childhood sweetheart, who later became his wife. The couple have four children, three sons and a daughter, aged between 14 and 23. Ugbana is extremely personable and is well known across the parliamentary estate for helping people. His efforts were recognised recently when he won a diversity and inclusion award for being “an inspiring role model”. In his spare time, Ugbana plays basketball with his sons in their local team and sings with the St Mary Undercroft choir at one of the staff carol services in Speaker's House.

The intention is that Ugbana will take up his role and duties as Serjeant at Arms next week—I very much expect and anticipate on Monday next week. I am sure colleagues and those who work in the service of the House will join me in warmly welcoming him to his role, congratulating him on all that he has achieved and wishing him well in the important and challenging period that lies ahead.

Britain's Place in the World

Debate resumed.

3.13 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I start by warmly welcoming the announcement you have just made and offering our congratulations on behalf, I am sure, of the whole House.

This could be the most important week in Parliament for decades: a first Saturday sitting since 1982, only the fifth since the second world war, and obviously huge decisions to be made. What a shame it is that we start the week with a Queen's Speech that is so manifestly not fit for purpose—a political stunt, not a credible programme for government. It is the first time that I can remember a Queen's Speech being introduced by a Government who have no means to implement it, and frankly little intention of doing so.

The Queen's Speech includes seven Brexit Bills. The Prime Minister made a great deal of that yesterday, pretending that they are the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech, but close examination tells a very different story. The 2017 Queen's Speech said that

“my Government's priority is to secure the best possible deal as the country leaves the European Union.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 June 2017; Vol. 783, c. 5.]

This year's Queen's Speech says that the Government's priority is

“to secure the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 October 2019; Vol. 800, c. 2.]

Abject failure of Government for two and a half years.

What are those seven Brexit Bills? On analysis, five of them are identical to those introduced in the last Session. Five of the seven are exactly the same Bills: the agriculture Bill, the fisheries Bill, the trade Bill, the immigration and social security co-ordination (EU withdrawal) Bill and the financial services Bill. All five started life in the last parliamentary Session. All five were then dropped when it became clear that there was no chance that they would get a majority. This Queen's Speech indicates that they will all start again on the same track. We cannot dress up a step back as a step forward.

Then we have the WAB—the European Union (withdrawal agreement) Bill—the implementation Bill, which was floated in the last Parliament but never introduced. Again, it was not introduced, because the numbers were never there for it, and that was before the Government had a minority of minus 45.

Sir Hugo Swire: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will in just one moment. The reality is that, of the seven Bills paraded as the centrepiece, five were exactly the same as the ones that have just been dropped and one is the same as the one that the Government would not introduce because they did not think it would win. That only leaves the lonely old private international law (implementation of agreements) Bill.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will in just one minute. The private international law Bill is undoubtedly important; it deals with commercial law, family law and private law. But if that is the summit of the Government's new proposals and approach to Brexit, it just underlines how absurd and unnecessary it was to have this Queen's Speech.

Sir Hugo Swire: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, in his typically eloquent way, has merely rehearsed why this Government and this Parliament are in a state of paralysis: because we are reintroducing these Bills time and time again, and it is groundhog day every day now. The public are looking on in blank amazement as we continue to procrastinate. Where does he stand on the subject of a general election? It seems to me that the only way that we can act properly as a Parliament is to try to get a majority, of whichever party, in order that we can enact this legislation.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, mainly because it double-underlines the point I am trying to make. This is the second day of the debate on the Queen's Speech, and I am challenged on whether we should have a general election. This is supposed to be the opening of a new parliamentary Session. The point I am making is that this Queen's Speech is a pretence. Those Bills got stuck because there was not a majority for them, so we are now reintroducing them.

Crispin Blunt *rose*—

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I promised I would give way to the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) first.

Crispin Blunt: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way, but what he knows, and the country knows, is that he had the opportunity many weeks ago, with all his colleagues, to vote for a general election today, on 15 October. They did not take that opportunity, so I am afraid that none of this presentation that he is making stacks up.

Keir Starmer: I am not going to vote for a general election until we have an extension. I am not going to allow our country to crash out of the EU without a deal. That is perfectly straightforward. That is my position. The hon. Gentleman may disagree, but that is my position. I am not going to vote for a general election until I know that an extension of article 50 has been secured and we are not leaving without a deal.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. We can see the desperation on the Conservative Benches for a cut-and-run general election. They know very well that the antidote to Brexit is the reality and the real lived experience of Brexit. I will tell you, gentlemen, that the experience of empty shelves and lack of medicines do not election winners make; when that occurs and you have your election, you are going to go down in flames.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am not. It is not “you”; it is “they”.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: They are going to go down in flames.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That is so much better.

Keir Starmer: To take this down a tone, so that we do not just get into trading insults on general elections, I listened very carefully to what the Secretary of State said. I am genuinely troubled about leaving without a deal, as I know many people on both sides of this House are, and I will genuinely do anything to prevent that, but the “do or die” pledge is just absurd. The talks are going on. They may not resolve this week. If the talks are still continuing on 30 October, and if the read-out is that they are possibly making progress, is it really the Government’s position that, do or die, we will leave on 31 October? It is absurd to have ever adopted that position.

Kevin Hollinrake: To follow the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s logic, there are only two outcomes beyond 31 October: either we leave the EU, with or without a deal, or there will be an extension. After that point, will he now commit to voting for a general election if a motion were tabled on 1 November?

Keir Starmer: I will not vote for a general election until the extension is secured, and we are not currently in that position. We can trade these discussions all afternoon, but the absurdity is threatening no deal, which would cause huge harm to this country and fundamentally undermine the Good Friday agreement, and throwing away any progress that has been made in the negotiations because the Government think the “do or die” pledge is more important.

My question to the Secretary of State, if he wants to answer it, is this: if it comes to 30 October and the negotiations are still continuing and making progress, is it the Government’s position that they will extend article 50 to allow that progress to continue, or will we leave on 31 October? Which is the priority? I would like an answer to that question, and it is up to him whether he wants to give one. Our country needs to know, because it is absurd to say, “We’re on the verge of an agreement, but we are still going to leave without a deal because we said we would.” That is a ridiculous situation.

The ongoing Brexit negotiations are the backdrop to today’s debate. We may or may not know in the next 48 hours whether the Prime Minister will be able to put a deal to the House under the section 13 procedure. Let us wait and see. I have learned to be extremely cautious about the sorts of reports that are coming out on the progress that is being made, and I have learned to wait to scrutinise the final text.

I remember standing at this Dispatch Box at 10 o’clock at night on 11 March, when news of the last deal came through. The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster received the news as I was trying to respond—that is no criticism of him. The deal dramatically came through at 10 o’clock at night, and 24 hours later it had fallen apart because the Attorney General had given his advice on what the deal meant. So I have learned to wait to see what happens, and then to look at the detail.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): There have been press reports today that Mr Barnier has said the Government and the Prime Minister have to provide a legal framework by 12 o’clock tonight. There is a bit of confusion. There is no clarity from the Government on this situation.

Keir Starmer: That is one report, and there are so many reports coming through—they change all the time—but that underlines my point. I do not know, but it is quite possible that a conclusion will be reached later today that it is not possible to do a deal by this summit. It may be that that report is accompanied by news of progress. The suggestion may be that the talks go into next week, and up towards 31 October.

The question that the Secretary of State will not answer—he does not want to intervene on me—is: if that happens and we get right up to the deadline, is it the Government’s position that, do or die, we leave? Will the Government say, “Notwithstanding this, we are walking away without a deal because we said we would,” or will they allow time for the talks to continue? We need an answer to that serious question about the future of our country. This “do or die” nonsense is not helping anyone.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): With the European Union, we all know that deadlines sometimes lead to agreement. People have to work to deadlines. If there is never a deadline, all that happens is that the can is kicked down the road and decisions are not taken. The uncertainty caused by a further extension would be very bad for the economy. Can we not just stick to a deadline and get a deal? That would be the best thing for Britain.

Keir Starmer: I take the point about deadlines, but the serious question underpinning it is, what will be the position if it gets up to that deadline and, for whatever reason, the negotiations are continuing but the deal is not ready? Is it really the Government’s position that, because deadlines are so important, we will walk away from that progress and crash the country out without a deal? That is obviously uncomfortable for the Government, because Ministers do not want to intervene and tell me about their position.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman see the absurdity of his position? He said he would do anything to avoid a no deal, yet every single time he has had a chance to vote for an agreement he has refused to do so. Does he recognise the absurdity of his position in that regard?

Keir Starmer: I said from the very start that we should have a meaningful vote on the deal so we can judge whether it is good enough. We had to fight for that, because the previous Prime Minister was not inclined to give us a vote. We would have had a statement from the Dispatch Box saying, “This is the deal.” We had to fight for a vote and the right to judge the deal.

Bim Afolami: You should have voted for it.

Keir Starmer: That means we should have voted for any deal. We might as well not have had the vote. We set out the sort of deal we would support, but the previous Prime Minister did not reach out to seek consensus across the House. *[Interruption.]* No, she did not. She did it after 29 March, and everybody knows it. I was in those talks, and both sides said they were held in good faith, but everybody recognised that those talks should have happened two years before they did. If they had, there might just have been a deal that could have been supported by this House. It was the policy of the last Prime Minister not to vote for it.

[Keir Starmer]

Let me complete my answer, which is important as it goes to the nonsense that the Act we passed to secure an extension in certain circumstances somehow undermines the negotiations. No measure was taken by this House to prevent a no deal until after 29 March. The negotiations therefore continued for two years without any safeguard against a no deal, and those negotiations did not produce a deal that could go through the House. It is nonsense to suggest that the Act undermines the talks.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that if the Government genuinely mean “do or die” and are committed to crashing us out of the European Union after 31 October with no deal, the Secretary of State, who earlier refused to answer the question put to him by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) about the impact on Northern Ireland farmers, which would be catastrophic, should come to the House to answer that question?

Keir Starmer: I hope the Secretary of State would come to the House to answer that question and the many other questions that go with it. My judgment call is that a no deal fundamentally affects not only that aspect of our economy but many others, and fundamentally undermines the Good Friday agreement. There are many Members on both sides of the House who would not want to put this country in that position under any circumstances. Even dangling the threat that we would still leave without a deal on 31 October if the negotiations were ongoing is therefore absurd.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will give way, and then I will make some progress.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. Is he as amazed as I am with the quasi-religious, mystic veneration that the Brexiters have developed for 31 October? The date was given to them not from on high but by Donald Tusk in Brussels, yet they venerate it and think it is cast in tablets of stone. Their position goes from absurdity to absurdity.

Keir Starmer: My principal position is this: we did the right thing several weeks ago in passing a simple piece of legislation that says, “If by 19 October there is neither a deal nor agreement to no deal, we should take the safeguard of applying for an extension.” That is the law; it is not a debating point in this Chamber any more—it was, we debated it and we passed it. That is the law and it is what needs to happen on Saturday. In my experience, everybody says they want a deal—I do not doubt the sincerity of that, although I accept that people want different deals—until they see the detail. That is what happened to the previous Prime Minister. She was supported on the proposition of a deal, until she brought the deal back and people looked at it—then they did not like it. So there is a danger at the moment in overreaching where we have got to. We need to wait to see what comes back in the text, but what happened

last time was that the principle of a deal was agreed but the detail was not agreed when it got back here. That is why the Act we passed several weeks ago is so important.

Sir George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): I understand the point the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes about the Front Bench and I understand the potential absurdity he points out. However, will he elucidate for the House exactly what Labour’s settled party policy is on a deal that it would accept? Given the position he occupies, I very much hope that he would be able to give us a clear answer that would be backed by all Labour Members sitting behind him

Keir Starmer: I do not know how many times I have stood at this Dispatch Box pressing amendments for a permanent customs union and single market alignment, and for a level playing field on workplace rights, environmental rights and consumer rights. Every time I have done so, all but a handful of Conservative Members have promptly gone into the opposite Lobby to me to vote against. We have now reached a point—[*Interruption.*] I was asked a question, so I am just going to complete the answer. The five propositions around which we could see a deal emerging were set out in the detailed letter from the Leader of the Opposition to the then Prime Minister just before the cross-party talks started, so it may well be that people disagree with what that deal should look like but the idea that we have not set it out is not a fair one. Having got this far, having had two and a half years of failed deals and division, the only way now to break the impasse is to put whatever the deal is back to the public so that they can make a simple decision: do we want to leave on the terms on offer or would we not rather remain and break the impasse? I do not think this House is going to be capable of breaking the impasse without it.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): In the spirit of positivity, I wish to probe the right hon. and learned Gentleman slightly further on the point he has just made. Is his position now that he would accept some of the level playing field points that were made in the cross-party talks if they were in the political declaration or is that no longer the Labour party position? Is he committed to a second referendum in all circumstances?

Keir Starmer: At this stage, any deal that comes back from this Government ought to be put back to the public for them to decide whether those are the terms they want to leave on or not. I came to that position slowly, because I thought that if consensus was built over the two to three years since the referendum, there might have been a deal we could agree, along the lines I have suggested. But that consensus was not built, time has gone by, the deal has not gone through and now we are in a position where we cannot break the impasse without going back to ask that question. I hope that question is asked on the basis of the “best deal” that could be negotiated, by which I mean the one that does least harm to the economy and best protects the Good Friday agreement. Those are two extremely important red lines as far as I am concerned.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend has made an incisive point. Does he agree that this Government’s mismanagement over the past few years has been tragic in how they have

tried to monopolise the negotiation on such a critical national issue? Their own partisanship has visited this grief on the country in this way, which is why the only way now to break this deadlock, this impasse, and the acrimony that has built up in our country is by discharging this through a public vote.

Keir Starmer: I do agree. I cannot help feeling that in 2015 we had a Prime Minister who promised a referendum we did not need in order to try to hold his party together, then we had a Prime Minister who would not reach for consensus because she was calculating the numbers on her own side instead of the numbers across the House and now we have a Prime Minister with an absurd do-or-die pledge, which is counter-intuitive and not putting the interests of our country first.

Let me just make this broader point: our central concern in all of this has been about the extent to which any deal will protect the economy, jobs, rights and security, not about the backstop and not the border situation in Northern Ireland, which is obviously the intense focus of the discussions going on at the moment. That is why I rejected the last Prime Minister's deal, and it looks as though any deal the current Prime Minister manages to secure—if he does—will be worse on both the backstop and on the wider question.

On the question of the border in Northern Ireland, a summary of proposals was presented to the House on 2 October, but they were not promising, because from that summary it looks as though the Government are going back on the commitments that they made in the 2017 joint report, and their proposals would unavoidably mean physical infrastructure on the island of Ireland. The proposals lack any credible mechanism to ensure the consent of all communities in Northern Ireland, which is a central tenet of the Good Friday agreement. Frankly, it was wrong to go down the route of a veto in Northern Ireland in relation to the Good Friday agreement, which absolutely depends on the consent of both communities for anything that happens under that agreement. If the proposals have changed significantly, I would ask the Secretary of State to update the House, but we remain cautious and will not support proposals that lead to a hard border in Northern Ireland or undermine the Good Friday agreement.

On the wider issue of the protection of the economy, jobs, rights and security, the Prime Minister's current proposals on changes to the level playing field arrangements tell their own story. The seven-page explanatory memorandum that the Prime Minister put before the House says:

"There is...no need for the extensive level playing field arrangements envisaged in the previous Protocol."

He has made no secret of the fact that he wants to step off the level playing field arrangements. I remind the House why those arrangements were previously included and are so important: they ensure that the UK cannot deregulate or undercut EU rights and standards. They were always minimum protections. We would have liked them to have been written into the withdrawal agreement. It is extraordinary and deeply significant that the Government have now decided to strip away even these basic protections.

The bigger point—this is not a technical point about what is in or out of this particular deal—is that it sets us on a course for a distant relationship with the EU and

gives the green light to deregulation and to diverge. That is what the Prime Minister has said is his intention: to diverge is the point of Brexit. It is really important that we make it clear that that kind of deal—one that rips up the level playing field for those at work, for the environment and for consumers—could never be supported by Labour and could never be supported by the trade union movement. If the Prime Minister brings back a deal along those lines, he should have the confidence to put it back to the people in a confirmatory referendum, because such a deal would have profound consequences.

The concern is about not just the technicalities of the level playing field—although it is a technical question—but the political ramifications. Once we have decided to diverge from EU rules and regulations, we start down a road to deregulation, and it is obvious where that leads. The focus on trade and on our rights and regulations will move away from the EU—

Rehman Chishti: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will just finish this point, then I will.

Once we say, "I don't want to be part of those rules or regulations; I want to diverge", we are moving our gaze away from the EU as our most important trading partner and our gaze goes elsewhere, across the Atlantic, to a trade deal with the United States, with obvious consequences—

Rehman Chishti *rose*—

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con) *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I will give way in just a minute.

There would be obvious consequences for our public services, for businesses, for food and environmental standards and for workers' rights. I know that for some Members that has always been the key purpose of Brexit, but it would be profound, because we would move away from a European-style economy with a level playing field underpinned by strong rights and protections, to a different economic model based on deregulation, low tax and low standards. In short, we would end up with an arm's length relationship with the EU and would be hand in hand with the United States. That is not something that the Opposition will ever countenance.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I did say that I would give way to the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti).

Rehman Chishti: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. I raise this question with him specifically because he is a former Director of Public Prosecutions. He talks about rights and international attitudes; this House passed a Magnitsky Act to allow sanctions against those who abuse human rights. We are talking about Britain's place in the world. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that if the Government look to put through Parliament those rules on sanctions against those who violate human rights, we should put our values clearly in that legislation? We should put religious freedom, modern slavery and freedom of media in there so that we are clear on where we stand on sanctions on individuals who violate human rights.

Keir Starmer: Let me draw on my experience and answer that. It is perfectly true that we want to collaborate and co-operate around the world on issues that are important to us, including modern slavery. I have paid tribute in the past, and do so again, to the previous Prime Minister for what she did on modern slavery. She took it forward and put serious legislation before the House that made a real difference, not only in this country but around the world. But the most intense work that we do, with the best arrangements, is with the EU. On counter-terrorism, we have arrangements in place across the world—of course we do—but the best and the most intense are with the EU by a country mile.

Mrs Main *rose*—

Sir Hugo Swire *rose*—

Keir Starmer: Let me just finish this point.

Those arrangements are far more effective in so many respects. The ability to share intelligence with our EU partners is on a different footing from that which we share with other countries across the world. Enforcement mechanisms provide a simple example. Every terrorist cell that I have ever ended up prosecuting operated across borders, and one of the vital questions in those circumstances is: do you have the necessary arrangements to carry out the arrest of that cell and assess its intelligence together as a group? Those are available through Eurojust. Then there is: do you have a strategy for making sure that your arrests are all carried out at the same time; do you have a protocol for deciding where the prosecution will take place so that it is likely to be successful; and, equally, do you have rules about whether evidence captured in one country can be used in the other? All of that is available to us as a member of the EU, and all of that falls away, particularly on a no-deal Brexit. Technical it may be, but save lives it did—in huge numbers.

Sir Hugo Swire: On the subject of intelligence, the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows full well that our many intelligence allies under Five Eyes are not actually within the EU, but he makes an important point. Of course, it is important that we continue to share intelligence on everyday matters with the EU, and I, for one, do not believe that the EU will not want to do that, otherwise the United Kingdom will be the weak link in its chain. He makes, if I may say so, a fundamental mistake when he presents his argument as a binary choice in terms of trade between the EU and the US, thereby neglecting about two thirds of the world, including some of the fastest emerging markets in the world, which are not in the EU and are not the US. They are the Commonwealth countries and other countries further afield. Those countries are where our future markets lie.

Keir Starmer: I well understand the Five Eyes arrangements in terms of intelligence sharing, but even with the Five Eyes countries, we have problems with extradition. I did many extraditions to the US; they take years. They are hugely complicated. The evidence has to be tested in a different way here before someone can be extradited to the US, and vice versa. Sometimes one cannot extradite, because there are conditions around the process. Let us compare that with EU extradition, which takes just days. As we all know, we had bombings in London—the 7/7 bombings. We forget that two weeks after that bombing, there was another attempted bombing,

which did not succeed only because the explosive devices were damp—all five of them. One of the individuals who tried to detonate a bomb in Shepherd's Bush ran off to Italy, and we had him back here within 60 days under EU extradition arrangements. He was then tried in Woolwich and is now serving 40 years. That is what happens under a European arrest warrant and extradition. We simply do not have those arrangements with Five Eyes countries. I am not doubting the intelligence side of it; I am talking about the practical enforcement of counter-terrorism measures. That is the reality. That is why this suggestion of “do or die, we will leave without deal” is so wrong for our country.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a great speech, but is there not a huge question mark over the Schengen information system, the largest database in the world? If we do not have access to that, our citizens will be under threat.

Keir Starmer: I do agree with that and it chimes with what I was saying.

I think there was a second part of the challenge that was put to me that I have not yet addressed, which is: surely our future lies elsewhere other than trading with the EU. I do not accept that. What is this argument? Is it that, somehow, not trading with the countries that we trade most with—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps if I can finish, the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) can come straight back in. Through EU trade arrangements, we have access to another 67 countries, so the best part of 100 countries are available to us through EU membership, because of the trade deals that the EU has done. So we have the original 27—*[Interruption.]* Just let me finish the point, and then Members can shout at me—*[Interruption.]* I am asked, “why wait?” It might be worth waiting. We deal directly with 27 countries as a result of the customs union and the single market in a most effective way, and every business in the country that trades with Europe says that relations are excellent. Through our EU membership, we have another 67 countries that we deal with on EU trade agreements. That is nearly half the world. So this argument that somehow there is a brilliant tomorrow out there that has nothing to do with the brilliant arrangements that we already have in place is something that I have never seen evidenced. In fact, I looked through the Government's impact assessments—when we were finally allowed to see them—for evidence that these new trade agreements would make up for all the loss, but it was not there. The Government's own assessments said that we will be worse off as a result of leaving the customs union.

Mrs Main: I am sorry for missing the very beginning of the debate, but I had a meeting with the aviation Minister.

I want to go back to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about the proposed deal being very bad for workers' rights and so on. I completely accept that that is Labour's point of view and that the Labour party thinks there should be a referendum on the deal. If it were put to a referendum and the public voted for the deal—even though Labour Members feel that it is not the deal they would like—and then there were to be a Labour Government, would they implement that deal? There will be a huge amount of legislation with

any deal, and it is important to know that a Labour Government would deliver the deal even if they disagreed with it.

Keir Starmer: Let me be clear about my position. If we go down the road of having a referendum, I think that it must be between a negotiated deal and remain. When I say “negotiated deal”, I mean one that the EU would actually sign off, because I do not think it is fair to people to offer an option to leave that is not a proper option. I would go further. I would advocate that this House actually passed the implementation legislation, subject to a coming-into-force date or something like that, to show that it could be done straightaway. We would have to show that the deal had been secured with the EU and could therefore be delivered, and also that we had already put in place the means to deliver it in this place so that we could actually resolve this situation—one way or the other—within a short period of time. I now think that that is the only way to break the impasse.

I am now going to make some progress because I have taken a lot of interventions. I have outlined Labour’s approach, and it is our approach because we believe in international co-operation, upholding international law, and that we need to work alongside our closest and most important allies. Let me take just one example of that: climate change. I listened very carefully to what the Secretary of State said. This Queen’s Speech has 22 Bills—yet what was there on climate change? One mention, in the final paragraph. The climate emergency should be the issue around which our politics evolves and revolves. It is the foreign policy challenge of our time and the defining issue of global security. It should be the focus of the UK’s diplomatic and development efforts, and it, not Brexit, should have been the centrepiece of this Queen’s Speech. The fact that it got just one mention is a measure of the Government’s lack of leadership on this central issue.

This Queen’s Speech was entirely unnecessary. It is packed with Bills that the Government know are never going to get passed. It fails to recognise—let alone tackle—any of the huge challenges we face, and shows that the Government are oblivious to the need for radical change. Frankly, it is the weakest defence imaginable for the decision to prorogue Parliament for five weeks, which was unlawful and obviously unnecessary.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): There is now a seven-minute time limit on speeches.

3.47 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I welcome the Queen’s Speech and the range of Bills the Government have put forward. I would prefer that we were not having a Queen’s Speech. I would rather be knocking on doors in Poole at the start of a general election campaign, because it is true that there is an impasse in this Parliament, caused largely by people who said one thing in the general election but changed their position. I have not done so because I think that honouring the result of the referendum is a matter of honour. It is what we said in our manifesto and what I said in my election address. In fact, all the parties said that they would honour the result of the referendum.

People voted to leave—for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health; it was not actually conditional on anything in particular. But I happen to believe that a deal is

probably better because a managed exit will probably be less difficult. The important thing is to have a transition, which will give us some time to get a trade agreement. The trick with all this is to maintain the best possible trade arrangements with the EU while opening up opportunities with other countries in the world. In the short term, the EU is more important, but in the long term other countries may be more important.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman mentions referendums. May I give him the good news—the breaking news, in fact—that the First Minister of Scotland has announced from Aberdeen that there will be a referendum in 2020 and that it is going to be on Scottish independence? We welcome that on the SNP Benches.

Sir Robert Syms: The simple truth of the matter, though, is that we always knew that a deal produced by the Government would be a compromise. I think it unfortunate that the previous deal, although it had major faults, was not passed. I hope that the Government make some progress with the talks this week and that perhaps a little later in the week we have some good news. Certainly, engaging with the European Union, which the current Prime Minister is doing, is a good thing. I think the EU has proved to be a little bit more amenable to further discussions than one might have thought earlier in the year, and I hope that we make some progress. However, as I said in my intervention on the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), deadlines are what make progress. What gets the attention of the European Union is a deadline creeping up. The EU must be thoroughly fed up with us, with extensions and further negotiations and endless Brexit, but we have to come to an end point.

Where I disagree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman—although I understand his point and where he stands at the moment—is on a confirmatory referendum, which would probably take us up to the spring at the earliest. That is another six months. We have a lot of discussion in this Chamber about money and resources. That would mean our continuing to pay into the EU budget for another six months. It would mean that there would be less money within the UK budget for paying for some very important things. I hope that we get a solution that is an agreement, and I hope it is put to this House. I do not think another referendum is the right way, because there is a fundamental democratic point, which is to carry out the result of a referendum that was given to the British people. Having a second referendum before we implement the first referendum would, I think, cause my constituents great anger. However, everybody takes their position, and I have admired the way in which he has manoeuvred and gone forward and backwards. He made a long speech today and did not take many interventions. That is what happens when one does not have very much to say and does not really have a position, and the position may change. From an Opposition point of view, that is brilliant, but from the point of view of our country, it is not the best position. The Opposition have to come down on a definite position at some point.

I welcome the immigration Bill and the end of freedom of movement. However, that does not mean reducing immigration: it means setting and controlling immigration at what is appropriate for the British economy. I hope

[*Sir Robert Syms*]

that we remain an open and confident country taking our part in the world. Our history, our tradition and our language mean all of that.

The Secretary of State made some very important points. If our aid budget teaches girls to read, they can read a medicine bottle and teach their children to read. It is a major game changer in terms of the world, and Britain is at the forefront of doing it. It is because the focus of Britain is worldwide and the focus of some European countries is rather narrower that we have a larger aid budget and people appreciate it around the world.

I welcome the fisheries Bill, which gives us a great opportunity to revitalise our fishing industry. It is very important to bring that forward. The financial services Bill will have a major impact.

On the medicines and medical devices Bill, it is true that, despite the great success of our NHS, we are sometimes quite slow to innovate in drugs and medical devices. Whenever I have known anybody come up with a new idea, it tends to get trialled, re-trialled and re-trialled again rather than implemented. There is a lot of progress that we can make.

I welcome the Government's commitment to mental health and social care reforms, which are remarkably good. The further consultation on the victims' law is very important. I think we are all very concerned about what we are doing for victims.

Of course, many of us have pensions and many people have lots of little different bits of pensions. More information through the pensions dashboard is quite important in enabling people to make long-term choices.

I also support what the Government are doing on voter ID. When I collect a package from Royal Mail or from various bodies, I have to produce ID. In terms of the very important prospect of voting, it is not unreasonable for people to have to produce ID. Whether or not the focus on a passport or driving licence is too narrow and ought to be a little wider—maybe a council tax bill or something—I do not know. However, it is a debate to be had, because there is a lack of confidence in some of the ways in which elections are conducted in our country.

As a nation, we have so much to be proud of. Sometimes we do not stand up for our own interests and blow our own trumpet, but the Government have a good record. We have provided a very good base—a successful economy—and because of that we are able to spend a little more money in key areas. I hope that we can resolve Brexit sooner rather than later and therefore get back to a proper domestic debate on all the important issues such as health, education and transport. I fully support the Government's Queen's Speech, and I hope it gets the support that this House ought to give it.

3.55 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): It is sometimes easy to forget the sunlit uplands of days gone by when those of us in Westminster were not entirely immersed in the omnishambolic boorach that is Brexit. In old money, I would still be a first-term MP, rather than one facing a third general election in just over four years. In days gone by, if a new Government came in with a fresh set of ideas—say, to take us out of the European Union,

upending decades of peace, stability and progress—we might expect them to have some idea of how to deliver their promises and what impact it might have on us all.

Well, 2015 seems like a long time ago—not so long ago, to be fair, because the same old faces who proposed leaving the EU without any sort of plan for how to deliver on their commitments once again find themselves in senior positions in Government where they can act on their commitments. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose, as they might say in the francophone parts of Brussels. Here we are, years on from the EU referendum, and those who failed to deliver on their Brexit commitments the first time around look like they are going to fail a second time around. What an almighty mess! We are now hearing reports that election leaflets from the Conservatives accept that we will not leave on 31 October—quite right too; it is the law. Let us hope that those in Conservative headquarters are a little bit better at sticking to the law than the Prime Minister appears to be.

The UK Government's own analysis tells us that every type of Brexit will leave us worse off and poorer as a result of leaving the EU—every type. We are healthier with the co-operation in medicine supplies and groundbreaking research from our membership. We are wealthier with access to the world's biggest single market. We are fairer in terms of workers', parental and other rights, which I would not trust this or any other Tory Government with. And we are greener in tackling the climate emergency and developing technologies, where Scotland is leading the way, even if this Government do not always give us the powers that we need. Of course we can do better. Deepening co-operation between 28 independent and sovereign states—let us not forget that members of the EU are independent and sovereign—will never be easy.

Crispin Blunt: We heard the news from the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) about the proposed referendum on independence. If that referendum took place and was carried in the affirmative, would he then say that Scotland will not leave the Union of the United Kingdom unless it could secure a deal with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Stephen Gethins: This is the most extraordinary thing. They sit here with no plan for Brexit, demanding all sorts that they cannot deliver, and telling the people of Scotland—who, time and again, provide a majority to the party that believes in independence—what is best, but forgetting that there are 27 models throughout the European Union for member status, which was also set out before the referendum in a White Paper. I like the hon. Gentleman—he might not thank me for saying that—but he fails to remember that it is traditional in a democracy to set out the plans before the vote, rather than four years later, scrabbling about days before we are due to leave, seeking a plan. The reason for that is that independence is normal. Member status of the European Union is normal. Brexit—isolationism—is not normal.

Leaving the EU will make us poorer, more decentralised, less fair and isolated from our closest partners, but let us just for one moment focus on one of the proposals—just one—contained in the Queen's Speech. Rarely has there been a more damaging and regressive bit of legislation than that proposed to scrap freedom of movement. It is

a freedom that generations of citizens have benefited from—from the pensioner who seeks retirement in Spain after years of hard work to the young person starting out on their career in education and getting valuable training or work opportunities in the Netherlands. That was me once upon a time—benefiting from freedom of movement. I did not benefit from the expensive education that many of the Brexiteers had, but I was able to use freedom of movement to my advantage to advance my education and career. The UK will now be unique among our neighbours in our citizens not having those opportunities. Why on earth would I vote to take away opportunities that I myself have had?

Mr Jim Cunningham: On the issue of freedom of movement, did the hon. Gentleman notice that the Government talked in the Queen's Speech about introducing a new immigration system—what they call a points system—under which people coming to this country could be directed to a certain location? What does the hon. Gentleman think about that? That does not give them much freedom of movement, does it?

Stephen Gethins: All of this takes away our rights, and the hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point.

If we need any further advice, what do we say about the hundreds of thousands of UK citizens who are now desperately looking up long-lost family connections to see whether they can get a much sought after EU passport? I cannot blame them for doing so—I will not blame them—and I can understand why they would do it, but I do blame this Government for devaluing UK citizenship, and for nothing: they have given up any pretence that any of this is a good idea or that any of this benefits us, and freedom of movement sits at the heart of the benefits that UK citizens have had for generations. The UK will now be unique among its neighbours in not having freedom of movement for our citizens. It is tragic, and it is regressive.

Today's debate is about Britain's place in the world, but Britain's place in the world has rarely been more diminished than it has been by this Government. I think that has been done not by the people of the UK or even those who voted leave, but by the continuing failure of those who sold a Brexit myth and have absolutely no idea how to deliver it. It has even been diminished in the view of those who the Brexiteers think will save us from our nearest neighbours. I note that former Prime Minister Gillard of Australia has said:

"I do worry that people are starting to imagine that a trade deal with Australia is somehow a substitute for being on the doorstep of a market with 500 million people—it's not."

She is right. I also notice that Canada's *Globe and Mail* has had to express an apology recently because, six months ago, it described the Government's Brexit policy as a complete "omnishambles", saying that things could not get any worse, but of course things did get worse. At least, it had the decency to apologise for the mistake it made.

The broader mess of Brexit is seen more globally where the UK has become more and more isolated at a time when it needs to work with its international partners. The Secretary of State talked about a leading role in global affairs. Why does he not talk about a leading role in global affairs to the Yemenis, given that we have held the pen at the UN, but cannot deliver on the agreement

and continue to sell arms to one of the perpetrators of that conflict? This is a Government who model themselves and their policy on Trump's White House. That is not the international positioning I think the UK Government should be looking at, and it is not the leadership that anybody should be looking at.

Rehman Chishti *rose*—

Stephen Gethins: On that point, I will give way one final time.

Rehman Chishti: Colleagues of the hon. Gentleman in the SNP were at the Holy See with parliamentarians from across the House at the canonisation of Cardinal Newman, one of our great British saints. Will he assure me of his support as we take forward the work on freedom of religion and belief so that we can work together around the world in promoting that basic fundamental value?

Stephen Gethins: Yes, I absolutely do. I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Gentleman has done on that. We see the devastating consequences when we do not respect one another's freedom of religion or belief, not least in Syria at the moment. I was fortunate enough to go with Aid to the Church in Need to the Syrian border to see the good work that is being done there and the work done by my own constituents with Sam's House on the humanitarian crisis.

The hon. Gentleman has done excellent work on that. I hope that he will not mind me saying that the humanitarian crisis has been made worse by Turkey's recent actions. I pay tribute to the reporters who are reporting back and to the humanitarian organisations. SNP Members believe—I know that there is not always unanimity on the Government Benches—that meeting the 0.7% target for international aid is not only necessary and humanitarian but a good investment. Peace is a good investment.

The UK needs to take a bit of responsibility. As I mentioned, it should do so over the British orphans who have been left in Syria. It needs to do so, and I hope that there will be some movement from the Foreign Secretary. The fall in the UK's international standing is not something in which any of us should take any pleasure. I most certainly do not. As someone who worked in the European institutions, I was able to see at first hand the positives—I say this as a member of the SNP—that the UK delivered in partnership with other EU member states. Leaving is a loss for everyone, but particularly for everyone who lives in the United Kingdom. That is why it is little wonder that increasingly Scotland sees its future not as part of this Union but as a member of the European Union. At least that Union respects the rights, sovereignty and votes of its members.

The UK is a Union that likes to say no—no to devolution of immigration and business regulation so that we can stay in the single market, as called for by the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and others; no to freedom of movement; no to more powers so that we can tackle climate change; no to giving people a choice over their own future. It does like to say yes to expensive new nuclear bombs that we don't need; yes to austerity, yes to a power grab and yes to hitting the most vulnerable in our society and pursuing the most extreme form of Brexit that no one voted for.

[Stephen Gethins]

No political organisation has an automatic right to existence. The UK Union has no automatic right to existence. It is increasingly clear that the best thing for everyone in the UK is that we build a real partnership of equals. That is achievable only with independence, as Brexit has underlined. Brexit helps no one. It has been particularly harmful to our relationships with our closest neighbours. For some time—and today the First Minister is doing the same thing in Aberdeen—we have argued that Scotland can help. As a member state of the EU in our own right, Scotland will act as a bridge between Brussels and London helping to rebuild the shattered relationship between our most important multilateral relationship and our most important bilateral relationship. That will be good for Scotland, as we attract business, research and opportunities while helping our neighbours to get out of this mess.

Finally, for what it's worth, I do not think that this Government's extreme right-wing Brexit plan reflects England, our closest neighbours. I do not think that this Prime Minister saying that he will break the law reflects England. The way in which England's footballers and manager last night stood up to racism with dignity is reflective of England, not the way in which this Government have carried out their business. In some ways, this is the same speech that we on these Benches have been delivering for four years, but the Government are still making the same mistakes on the same proposals three and a half years on. It is time to change.

4.9 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Ind): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). I agreed with what he said about 0.7% of GDP for UK aid. He is dead right. That is one of the great achievements of this Government since 2010. I was interested in his point about working out the detail before a referendum has happened instead of in its last weeks. I wonder whether we will hear from the SNP before the next independence referendum the detail on whether it wants to keep the pound and what its plan is to keep the pound. I would be happy to take an intervention on that from its leader in the House.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I am most grateful and I commend the hon. Gentleman for the tone of the start of his speech. Let me give an absolute cast-iron commitment that when the SNP brings forward its plans for independence, as it will very shortly, we will set out in exact detail the kind of country we want and have an open discussion with friends and opponents on what kind of society we want to live in.

Steve Brine: I take that as no answer on the pound.

I warmly welcome yesterday's Queen's Speech and the fact that we have at least opened a new Session of Parliament. We have 26 Bills to be getting on with and all the more immediate Brexit endgame stuff to play out. I will not labour them all, but I want to touch on a few, not least as a former Health Minister. I welcome plans for an independent NHS investigations body—the health service safety investigations body, or HSSIB, which was talked about when I was in the Department—to look into serious healthcare incidents. There are other

measures relating to adult social care and medicines policy. As a former Minister with responsibility for medicines, I look forward to scrutinising that policy.

I very much welcome the ambitious new policies on criminal justice. It was good to hear the Prime Minister yesterday talk about the rehabilitation of offenders during his remarks in the House. Far from the environment being an afterthought in the Queen's Speech—I did not see it that way at all—I am delighted to see a new Environment Bill that promises to set legally binding targets to reduce plastics, cut air pollution, restore biodiversity and improve water quality. As promised, the animal welfare Bill to outlaw the proceeds of trophy hunting will be very welcome. I only wish we could outlaw the actual act as it happens in other countries, which shows a darkness in the heart of man that we should leave firmly in the past. These are good measures on the environment. My "Green Winchester" campaign, which I have run since before I was elected, will look forward to getting stuck in to all that. I know there will be a lot of interest from my constituents.

I want to touch on three points. First, I have spoken about Brexit and citizens' rights in this Chamber many times since the referendum. In my opinion, Britain cannot have any secure place in the world if it is not a secure place that welcomes citizens from anywhere in the world. It is, of course, good news that the Queen's Speech contains the immigration Bill. It will make clear that resident European citizens in this country and in my Winchester constituency, who have built their lives in and contributed so much to the UK, have the right to remain.

Indeed, I note that the Gracious Speech said that the Bill will include measures that "reinforce this commitment", which is excellent. When the Minister responds to today's debate, I would like to hear a little bit more about that. I am quite clear—many of my constituents will share this wish—that this is not something that we should be getting around to in late 2019 or early 2020. The previous Government—the Prime Minister said this at the time—should have legislated right away to end the uncertainty that our EU friends and neighbours living here have felt since June 2016. Many of my constituents have contacted me to express that view.

Secondly, Britain is known for many things around the world and it is rightly looked up to. As a Health Minister, I was fortunate to represent our country at G7 and G20 meetings. The experience of travelling wearing that NHS badge was that so many countries are envious, and rightly so, of our NHS. We are probably its harshest critics here domestically. Perhaps that is how it should be, but when we talk around the world about our primary care, GP and cancer services, our screening programmes—we are the first country in the world to implement the faecal immunochemical test, or FIT, bowel cancer screening programme—and the immunisation programme we have in our country, we should remember that there are many things for which Britain is rightly looked up to.

Sure, the 2016 referendum was unusual for us as a country. We do not need to rehearse all the arguments about how a parliamentary democracy such as ours has struggled to reconcile an exercise in direct democracy, but I really do believe that we should not overthink how others view us and how this episode has had an impact on our place in the world. It has been said many times and it is worth repeating: this House actually represents

our country very well right now, divided as it is. We will see again on Saturday how divided our society is outside this building.

Ours is a working democracy and centuries of precedent and tradition, in my view, do not go bad in the space of three—although very long—years. I do not share the view, therefore, that we need to tear this House down, find our founding fathers and write a constitution—not yet anyway. Surely, the challenge of our current impasse has far more straightforward origins. As any student of politics learns in their first module about the House of Commons, this place works, and the Prime Minister's power derives from, having a majority in this place. Whether I or we like it, there will have to be a general election sooner or later. Whether that produces a result of any clarity is another matter.

Finally, turning back to Brexit, we have to be honest and say that Brexit presents challenges and opportunities for Britain's place in the world, but I suspect that how depends entirely on how this ends. I voted remain in 2016. I came to that conclusion because of the way I see our country: as part of something greater than even Great Britain. I am young and generally internationalist in my outlook. I have no issue with freedom of movement. As a Health Minister, I saw every day how our NHS needs the supply of labour.

I am not hung up on ceding an element of sovereignty to be a member state of the European Union. We do that as a member of other multinational organisations, including NATO, which, after all, has article 5 as the cornerstone of its foundation, stating that an attack on one is an attack on all. While I realise that this is anathema to some in our country and perhaps even in this House, when I see the British Prime Minister sitting around an EU summit table flanked by the big nations of Europe—being a big nation of Europe ourselves—I feel pride, not regret.

However, our country made a choice that we asked it to make. I may regret the result of the 2016 EU referendum, but I respect it and we must carry it through, and we will make it work. I realise that opponents of moderates have the luxury of taking a position from either of the spectrum. We have the Brexit party with its “Get Brexit Done”, saying that a clean break would just allow us to move on and put Brexit behind us. That is plain wrong. It would resolve nothing and is a recipe only for much further uncertainty. Equally, the Liberal party's view—sadly, its Members are not in the Chamber; what a surprise—is that we can just revoke article 50 and pretend, like Bobby Ewing coming out of the shower in “Dallas”, that it never happened, but as one constituent put it to me last weekend, that is just not cricket. We have to move forward from where we are in life and not from where we wish to be.

My view is that Britain's place in the world is strong, and I think that it will remain so. It is changing, that is for sure, but I suspect that when my children are my age—perhaps standing in this House one day—this current time will just be one part of the story that is this ongoing, successful United Kingdom.

4.17 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): If anybody thinks that Brexit has taken too long to get to this point, it is worth remembering that even if the Prime Minister

does get a deal and it is approved by the House, it will take a very long time for us to try to negotiate a new relationship with our biggest, nearest and most important trading partners. When one thinks of the list of things to be discussed—trade, services, data transfer, security, scientific co-operation, foreign policy, standards bodies and lots and lots of other things—it is very long. That is why—I say this to Government Front Benchers—the phrase “Get Brexit Done” is incredibly misleading, because we have not even begun to get Brexit done, as the years ahead will prove.

Things could get worse, which brings me to the question of a no-deal Brexit, which the Prime Minister has said he is prepared to inflict on the country if the current talks do not reach agreement. The House does not support that. We have heard what it could mean for the Nissan car plant in Sunderland. Vauxhall has said that it will not build the new model of its car in Britain if there is no deal. We read about Operation Yellowhammer. It is just as well that the House voted to require the Prime Minister in those circumstances to apply for an extension. Given the legal assurances that were finally produced by the Government in the Court of Session in Scotland, I am sure that he will abide by the law.

For the moment, however, the talks continue. Whether they are discussions or negotiations in “a” tunnel or “the” tunnel, we can establish some things. Having previously said, “Here's our final offer. Take it or leave it”—to which the EU replied, “Thanks very much, but that's not the basis for an agreement”—the Government now seem to have moved again, and then again. The more we hear about what is being discussed at the moment, the more it reminds every single one of us in the House of the former Prime Minister's customs partnership proposal—because that is what they are talking about now—only applied just to Northern Ireland, which is interesting because the current Prime Minister resigned from his job as Foreign Secretary saying of that last proposal that it “sticks in the throat” and that he could not support it. That merely proves how times change.

I think that we all understand why it is proving difficult: because a dual customs arrangement is untested; there are risks of fraud and smuggling; there are threats to the single market; it is not clear what consent mechanism Stormont would have; and it is all very complicated. We have to face up to the possibility that all we will get from the summit this week will be the EU leaders noting that some progress has been made and looking forward to further talks, in which case we are probably heading for a further extension anyway.

We know that the backstop is essential because we have to maintain that open border. The Prime Minister got himself into trouble when he announced that he wanted customs checks in Northern Ireland, which was never going to be acceptable to the EU and breached the solemn commitment that the previous Government gave to the EU in the joint declaration: that under all circumstances, there would be no checks, no infrastructure, no controls. That commitment is embedded in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Alex Cunningham: The issue of tariffs is very much on the minds of the farmers in my constituency who I met last week. The Government seem to be dodging the answer to the question what it will actually mean for

[Alex Cunningham]

farmers. I am told it will mean huge tariffs and the devastation of our farming industry. Would my right hon. Friend care to comment on that?

Hilary Benn: I would. I put the point to the Secretary of State earlier about the evidence we received this morning from the Ulster Farmers Union, whose one-word answer was simple: catastrophic. For the life of me, I cannot understand why any Government would wish to impose on that industry, never mind all the other industries, an outcome they know would be catastrophic. What is the possible justification? There is none, which is why the House was right to safeguard against it.

Ian Paisley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way because it is important to clarify the “catastrophic” issue. I also met that representative of the Ulster Farmers Union today, and he did not imply it in the way the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting. He said it would clearly be catastrophic if tariffs were only in one direction, and he encouraged the Government to let the Republic of Ireland know that if it put tariffs on Northern Ireland products moving south, the Government here would reciprocate. That, in his words, would soon “sober up” the Republic of Ireland.

Hilary Benn: I am merely reporting to the House what the witness said to us today. It is the Government’s policy that there would be no tariffs coming this way across the border in Northern Ireland, but of course, as we know, the EU would impose tariffs on goods, including agricultural products, going the other way. That is the Government’s policy in a few days if there is no agreement—thank goodness the House has prevented that from happening.

There has been very little discussion so far of what really matters, which is the future economic relationship. Whatever the details of the backstop, we will have to have a backstop, and the Prime Minister has said he is in favour of a Canada-style free trade agreement. What does that mean? It means that in our relationship with our biggest and most important trading partners, there would have to be customs checks, checks on standards and checks on rules of origin. At the moment, there are none, because we are in the single market and the customs union, and we know how many businesses have built their success on the absence of those checks. That is why last week we heard five really important sectors saying how bad for them, their businesses and their employees a Canada-style free trade agreement would be.

Let us remember that the comprehensive economic and trade agreement does not eliminate all tariffs, has inferior access to the single market and no mutual recognition. We learned last week, or the week before, from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs that having to fill in customs declarations would cost British businesses about £15 billion a year. We would not be in things such as the European Union Aviation Safety Agency or the European Chemicals Agency, which are so important to common standards, and unless we had a backstop, it would of course lead to a hard border in Northern Ireland. The Government also said they were moving away from the commitment to a level playing field. That came as a great shock. How exactly do Ministers expect

to secure good quota and tariff-free access to the European Union when the United Kingdom is saying to the EU, “Well, as your nearest and most important trading partners, we might seek to undercut you as our neighbours because we will have different standards and different regulations, even though we want to carry on trading with you”? I do not think that that is going to work. I hope that the Government are listening, because let us be frank: a Canada-style Brexit would be a hard Brexit; it would be a backward step for the economy; and the Government’s own assessment shows that it would have almost the worst impact on the economy, second only to a no-deal Brexit.

My final point is this. Here we are, meeting on Tuesday, with no idea what will be presented to us on Saturday. We have seen no papers—no draft texts, no political declaration—yet I think that a growing number of Members have come to the view that the only way in the end to resolve this question and to gain consent on the way in which leaving happens, if it is to take place, is to go back to the British people. I know that the Government have said that in no circumstances will they agree to a confirmatory referendum, but let us be honest: there are lots of other things that the Government have said during this Brexit mess that they would never do which they are now doing. Who knows what they are doing in the negotiations as we speak?

I would argue that going back to the British people does represent the compromise position in British politics. Over there are the Government arguing that they are prepared to inflict the damage of a no-deal Brexit on the nation, and over here, sitting near me, are those who argue that the referendum result should just be cancelled—scrapped—because that is what permanent revocation would mean. The moment of truth is approaching for the House. I believe that we will need to enlist the help of the British people, not to get Brexit done but to decide whether to remain or to go ahead, and if so, how.

I have never wavered from my view that Brexit is profoundly wrong for the future of our country and its place in the world—and I say that as an optimist, because the Prime Minister has no monopoly on optimism about our country—but the question is whether the British people have changed their minds. I do not know whether they have, the Prime Minister does not know and the House does not know, so let us ask the people, because they will know.

4.27 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is, as always, a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), and it is a pleasure to be called so early in the debate. Indeed, in some of our debates on the European Union it has been a pleasure to be called at all.

Reflecting on the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the last Parliament—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), my successor as Chairman, is present—I feel that I know only too well the cost of being a Brexiteer in this remainder Parliament. However, I am very proud of some of the work that the Committee did then, not only in analysing our future relationship with the European Union but in bringing home three unanimous reports on the vexed issue of Europe, although the Committee was split down the middle on the issue. Perhaps one of

the most important reports was produced in advance of the referendum, and was entitled “Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK’s role in the world”. Given that the subject of today’s debate is “Britain’s place in the world”, I think that it should focus more on what our role in the world will be when we have left the European Union. Of course, I understand that a rearguard action of huge ferocity and determination is in progress with the aim of reversing the decision—the decision!—that the people made in the referendum in 2016.

Stephen Gethins: I must pick the hon. Gentleman up on just one point. As someone who never voted for article 50 and as someone who wants to remain in the European Union, I have to say that this does not feel like a “remainer Parliament” to me. If it were, we would not be in this situation, because we would revoke article 50, which the Court said that we could do tomorrow.

Crispin Blunt: The hon. Gentleman makes it clear that there is an awful lot of smoke on this issue, with people not being totally clear and honest about the precise position they are taking. I exempt the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists from that. The hon. Gentleman’s amity for me is fully reciprocated, although I rather suspect mine might do to more damage to him than his will do to me, but on the question of no deal, the idea that Scotland, if it was allowed another referendum by this Parliament—[*Interruption.*] This Parliament would have to pass that, and I might point out to the hon. Gentleman that, as he well knows, we said we were dealing with this issue for a generation. If there was a future referendum, however, and Scotland voted to be independent, there would then need to be a negotiation about the terms of Scotland leaving the Union of the United Kingdom. The idea that he would come here and say that if the rest of the United Kingdom would not come to an agreement it would all be off is utterly preposterous. That is exactly the same kind of relationship that he has voted to impose on the United Kingdom in its negotiation with the European Community, however.

Finally, because we actually have a stated date of 31 October in mind, we are now getting the necessary concentration from our partners to at last get serious about the terms of the withdrawal agreement. I might just reflect that we have heard a great deal from the Taoiseach and the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Ireland in the years that have led into this negotiation, but finally, into the debate audibly came the Finance Minister a couple of weeks ago. I take that sense of financial reality—the financial implications of there being no withdrawal agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union—and the entry into the discussion of the Finance Minister of the Republic of Ireland as a thoroughly good sign that we are now going to get serious as we run into the final stages.

Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman’s observations about what has happened in the Republic of Ireland—the sobering up of some people’s views—are very telling. He will recall, as I do, that since the withdrawal agreement came into existence this House has been told that it is unalterable—it is sacrosanct; it cannot be changed—but what has been happening since the smiling meeting in the countryside of England last week? It is being changed—an amazing turn of events.

Crispin Blunt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that it is an amazing turn of events given the language used about the withdrawal agreement, but of course the reality is that it is not that amazing, because interests are finally entering properly into this discussion, and the interests of twice as many people in the European Union than in the United Kingdom are engaged in the economics of the outcome of there being no agreement. As the Foreign Affairs Committee said in our inquiry on the implications of no deal, it would affect a greater proportion of the UK’s economy, but more people on the other side of the channel and on the other side of the Irish sea will catch the consequences if we fail in bringing home a withdrawal agreement in the rest of this week.

I have to say to those on the Labour Front Bench, in the absence of the shadow Secretary of State, that the presumption that the noble purpose of defending the Good Friday agreement is why no deal must be taken off the table is false. Our fellow members of the European Union are of course not going to work to undermine the Good Friday agreement and the relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic once we have left the European Union. That is why we need to turn to the future and what Britain’s place in the world will be after this.

In the withdrawal agreement we have of course dealt only with the terms of the withdrawal, and what has to be settled is the future arrangements and relationship with the European Union. I trust that that negotiation will be rather better dominated from the beginning by the common interests that both the EU and ourselves have in a constructive trading relationship that gives us the opportunity to forge a new relationship with the EU, based on a new role in the world for the UK. The country made its choice between being part of a big bloc or being a nation of 65 million people on its own, and I think the choice it made in the long-term interests of the UK was the right one, given the direction that the European Union was going. We must convince our children of the merits of that role in the world.

The Secretary of State for International Development, in opening the debate, reflected on his visits around the world and on how the United Kingdom is seen. He focused on the values the UK is seen to uphold: our democracy, our rules-based system and the economic empowerment of people. One that he did not mention, which I think is one of the golden threads, is our respect for the law. That is why London is the place where so many international companies have their agreements judged under English corporate law—because our judges are trusted and our system is seen as fair. That is an English set of values that is seen as a global asset. Those values, including a sense of proper fair play, have been associated with England and the United Kingdom down the centuries.

We must explain Britain’s new role in the world to the generation of younger people who voted to remain in the European Union, thinking that voting to leave was somehow turning our back on internationalism. It is quite the reverse. The United Kingdom now has the opportunity to play a role in the world as a member of the United Nations Security Council, contributing properly to our security and defence through NATO, and as a development superpower making the commitment as a serious economy to spending 0.7% of our GDP on

[Crispin Blunt]

development and to putting our values into action across the world and being a global leader in every sense, for the best values of humanity.

4.37 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): These are truly uncertain times. We do not know what the outcome of the talks with the European Union will be. We do not know whether the measures contained in Her Majesty's Speech will receive the approval of this House. We do not know when we will be facing a general election contest, whereby the content of this speech, and others granting a legislative programme for a sitting Parliament to discuss, amend or scrutinise, will transform into the basis of a future Conservative manifesto. I welcome the fact that the Government have outlined their planned programme, and that, over the coming days, the House will have the opportunity to debate and scrutinise the Government's intentions.

"Britain's place in the world" is the title of this debate. I welcome what the Minister said about the commitment to education across the world for every young girl and woman. As others have said, the issue of FGM has to be addressed, as does the issue of access to the best medication to prevent TB, typhoid, HIV and all the other things that come with that. The Government have given that commitment, and I welcome that.

I am concerned about one thing that has been omitted from the Queen's Speech, which is the provision on armed forces veterans. I wish to take this opportunity to express my disappointment that that has not been included. A great many people up and down the length of the United Kingdom are deeply uncomfortable with the pursuit of elderly armed forces veterans for actions undertaken when serving in Northern Ireland. The Government should have taken this opportunity to protect those people, because I believe that that is the will of this House and that it has cross-party support. In relation to the Belfast agreement, people from all quarters have had to swallow hard and accept the release from prison of people who were guilty of the most horrendous crimes after serving a mere fraction of their jail sentence. In that context, it is wrong to see soldiers who were only ever in Northern Ireland to prevent the place from descending into anarchy being hounded in their old age, so it is my sincere hope that the Government will deliver very soon on protecting those who served the community and help to deliver the peace. For me, this is really important. The Government have omitted to do that, even though they have given a commitment to myself and others on both sides of the House that that will happen.

In relation to Brexit, I welcome the commitment outlined by the Government to work towards a new partnership with the European Union, based on free trade and friendly co-operation. As the representative of a constituency whose fisheries have been at the sharp end of policy decisions taken in the halls of Europe, it is my sincere hope that we will soon have control over our fisheries policy back in British hands. Over many years under the common fisheries policy, the industry has contracted sharply. In my Strangford constituency, in the fishing village of Portavogie, we now only have 40

boats in the harbours, whereas some 15 or 20 years ago we had almost 100 and, going back further, even more than that.

The Government have put forward legislation that will bring back the licensing power after the UK leaves the EU. Foreign boats will no longer have automatic access to UK waters. That is what I want to see and what the Government want to see; the quicker that happens, the more all those who represent fishing villages across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will welcome that policy.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not also realise that his fishermen, and the majority of fishermen in the UK, rely on access to the single market? Any no-deal Brexit would be devastating for them. It is also wrong to think that, if we had a no-deal Brexit, our waters would be closed off overnight. Because of international treaties through the UN, we would have to negotiate deals with individual nations.

Jim Shannon: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I have a contrary opinion to his—he probably expects me to say that. The reason is that I have confidence in the fishing sector and what it can do. I use the example of Portavogie: the products that we sell, Portavogie prawns, Kilkeel prawns and Ardglass prawns, are sold all over the world. They are sold because they are the best quality product and because they are wanted. Will those markets close just because the fisheries will not have access? No, they will not; they still want the product, so they will pay for the product and they will ensure they have access to it.

The Government have also committed themselves to subsidies that reward farmers for biodiversity, which I welcomed yesterday. I declare an interest, as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) referred to the Ulster Farmers Union, which he spoke to today, as did my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). I can tell them, as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, that my neighbours, who are all involved in the dairy sector, all wish to leave the EU and look forward to the future.

The Government have given a commitment to ensuring that some of the tariffs, subsidies and grants will be in place as long as they have the wherewithal to do that. Lakeland Dairies, in my constituency, has two factories in Northern Ireland and two in southern Ireland, and that milk product will cross the border on a number of occasions, so, again, the future for us is very bright.

I welcome the Government's commitment to the national health service and to health. Stating that minor ailments can be referred to pharmacies will take some of the pressure off general practitioners, doctors and nurses. I also welcome the Government's commitment to law and order, but also to their obligation to ensure the safety and security of the people they serve.

I particularly welcome the measures on prisoners' disclosure of victims. Just last week in Northern Ireland we had a man who was convicted of murdering a lady who disappeared some six or seven years ago. I believe it is imperative that we have in place a law that says, "If you have murdered someone and you don't disclose that, you get more years in prison." The Government

have given a commitment to bringing in that legislation; I know the families want to see that happen, I want to see it happen and it is good news.

It is also good news that the Government are bringing forward laws to implement new building safety standards. In Northern Ireland we have some 33 tower blocks; I understand that it is a devolved matter, but the fact is that we had a fire in Dunmurry, shortly after the Grenfell disaster, which brought home to us, and made us aware of, the need to have legislation in place.

I welcome the compensation that will come off the back of the historical institutional abuse inquiry for victims who have been abused over the years. I also welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that broadband connections are in place. The Democratic Unionist party has a confidence and supply agreement with the Conservative party, through which broadband was delivered, and we want to see that continue.

Ian Paisley: Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that, next week, Northern Ireland will benefit from a visit by the Australian high commissioner? There will be talks with Invest Northern Ireland and other important groups about the future relationships and trading opportunities that will now be open to Northern Ireland as a result of being free post Brexit. The Singapore high commissioner will be in Belfast the following week for similar talks with Invest Northern Ireland and political leaders. Does my hon. Friend recognise this will open up Northern Ireland to having an even greater place in the world?

Jim Shannon: Yes, I do welcome that. It is no surprise that we have good times coming and that the sun will shine again. We will not be in total darkness, as some people seem to say all the time. The Government have committed to doing deals with Australia, Singapore and others, and the Minister of State, Department for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), helped to secure a £250 million deal over five years for milk products from Lakeland Dairies in Newtownards, so things can happen. Life will not stop because we leave the EU.

Tips are a form of performance-related pay, and if staff serving in a public house or restaurant have performed so well that a person gives them additional payment for doing so, it is only natural justice that they should enjoy the full benefit of that payment. I hope we will be able to consider the Government's measure.

The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) spoke yesterday about voter identification, which we have had in Northern Ireland for a number of years. Voter ID was introduced to stop corruption and illegal voting, and it has gone a long way in doing that.

Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): We have had a voter ID pilot in Woking for the last couple of years. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the scaremongering about these successful pilots, and about what I am sure will be a successful roll-out, is just so much piffle and nonsense?

Jim Shannon: I agree that we should be looking forward to voter ID, and I welcome the Government's commitment to it. People should not be scared of it, because people have to show their driving licence or

some other form of ID to open a bank account. Voter ID has functioned well in Northern Ireland. We have not entirely eliminated electoral fraud in the Province, but we have gone a long way in doing so.

We are committed to the democratic process, we are committed to voter ID and we are committed to supporting the Government on the majority of their far-reaching proposals. We look forward to engaging with Ministers—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

4.47 pm

Sir George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on the Gracious Speech for the first time in my parliamentary career. I will focus narrowly on the trade Bill, which made its way through certain stages in the last Session.

The outline of the Bill looks moderately familiar—one might even say it is groundhog day—and we need measures to adopt the provisions of a transition agreement, to set up the Trade Remedies Authority, to accede to membership of the agreement on government procurement and to collect data about importing and exporting. Well, that is pretty much what the last Bill did. This time round, if we need the Bill to proceed, I hope those core parts will be passed by both Houses reasonably quickly.

Plainly, we have achieved rather more than Opposition parties thought we would in renegotiating the terms of EU trade agreements into a UK form, with some 70% of those agreements now on the books. Most of those agreements, because they have been passed and adopted by the EU, are on the UK books anyway, so I do not believe these measures should be particularly contentious.

The Trade Remedies Authority currently operates in a shadow form, which cannot be the right way of handling things. The Trade Remedies Authority is incredibly important to all of us in this House in the context of a long-term trade policy. Labour Members who represent industrial constituencies and who see unfair competition from abroad on ceramics, steel and building materials should be keen to see this provision on the books. World Trade Organisation rules on this are extremely complex. They demand enormous amounts of evidence on the breach of the terms of trade and, quite rightly, they impose high barriers in the way of restrictions to trade. Part of that is about having a stand-alone body that can do this to show independence from Government and that there are no political issues that the proposed measures are to satisfy. I urge all Members to make sure that, as and when this Bill comes to the House, they take due regard of the industries they would want to protect if this Bill does not pass with that measure included in it.

After that, I would hope that the measures to adopt the general procurement agreement and our accession to it will be easy for everyone to understand: access to \$1.3 trillion of international procurement opportunities seems to me to be very worth while. The information sharing across Government about what people might or might not be exporting is also extremely important. I stress now that at least in the last Bill that was a voluntary issue and was included so that exporters and importers knew as much about themselves and their sectors as did government. That is all in the context of what derailed the Bill last time around, and we need to be plain about that.

[*Sir George Hollingbery*]

It is clear to me that the rights and responsibilities of the devolved nations are recognised when we start to negotiate free trade agreements. Devolved nations have clear responsibilities. Certain parts of trade—of the economy, at least—that are devolved to those nations will have an impact on how we frame FTAs. It is clear to me that the devolved Governments must have their say as we put together our mandate and the negotiations with third party countries. I met the Ministers in the devolved Governments several times and worked extensively in the Department to try to ensure that we came up with a decent offer. I believe that offer was the right one, and I hope very much that the Department will note that we cannot lose sight of this issue. We work much more strongly and produce much better FTAs if we can be sure that the devolved Governments will come with us on that journey. I am convinced that they will, as long as they are treated fairly and properly.

Secondly, we have to address the way in which we scrutinise FTAs in this place. Once again, it is time for the House to look carefully at itself and its rules, and understand that these are important issues that will bind this country for the long term into arrangements with third party countries. These things have effects in the British economy that are not even necessarily directly related to what is in the agreements themselves. Furthermore, lots of them have 20-year run-off periods, so these arrangements cannot easily be undone, even by this House, even if it wants to do so. The Command Paper put to the House of Lords when we brought this Bill into the Lords last year detailed clear scrutiny mechanisms and a dedicated Committee for treaties. This was backed up again by the Constitution Committee of the House of Lords, which was recommending that the way forward that the Command Paper had outlined was the right one, and it is the one the Government should be pursuing. I add one rider: it seems to me that in this circumstance there is still debate to be had about whether the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 and the way in which we ratify treaties in this country is sufficient for FTAs, which are a very different sort of international agreement from many others. One has only to look at the complexity and the amount of paper involved in any one of these agreements to understand that further scrutiny might well be required.

I have a few more notes for the Department and for the House. We must continue to understand that market access negotiations with third party Governments, outwith FTAs, about difficulties in trading in their countries are every bit as important, not just to individual companies, but to the economy as a whole, for our trading internationally as FTAs. We must not lose sight of the fact that most trade Departments dedicate two thirds of their resource to market access and one third to FTAs. We must also take account of the environment and our 2050 targets when we strike new FTAs. How we can possibly reach our 2050 target if we pursue endless new FTAs that endlessly increase GDP—after all, that is what they are there to do—is a conundrum that the Department and this House will have to crack.

Should we get to a point where we are trying to pursue another trade deal with the EU, please let the Government not forget that we have very experienced trade negotiators in the Department for International

Trade who could well assist—believe me, that has not been the case so far. Finally, for the whole of Africa our representation through the DIT there is paid for by £3 million-worth of spending. Do we really think that is right? I do not and the DIT should have more funding.

4.54 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I wish to address the commitment in the Queen's Speech that

“Government will ensure that it continues to play a leading role in global affairs, defending its interests and promoting its values”—*[Official Report, House of Lords, 14 October 2019; Vol. 800, c. 3.]*

and to make the case that the guiding principles of our foreign policy should be justice, security and human rights, through a renewed focus on active diplomacy, multilateral engagement and sustainable development. Our diplomats are among the best in the world and our status as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council gives us real clout. We need to exercise that clout—and let us start with Syria.

The disastrous decision by President Trump to withdraw US troops from northern Syria has opened a horrifying Pandora's box, out of which the only winners can be Daesh and Assad. As ever, the losers are innocent civilians, including children. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's response to the urgent question earlier, but I invite the Minister to be clearer, when he responds to the debate, about the Government's approach to a new UN Security Council resolution on Syria, on which the UK could show leadership. Syria represents a collective failure from which we must learn.

Last week, some of us attended the parliamentary screening of “For Sama”, the story of Waad al-Khateab and her family's life through five years of the siege of Aleppo. The film is a harrowing account of war in the age of impunity, when war crimes go unpunished and the laws of war become optional. Chemical weapons, cluster bombs, the bombing of civilian infrastructure and the blocking of humanitarian supplies have seemed to become the norm. I welcome the Government's announcement earlier this year that they are reviewing the protection of civilians strategy. This is an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the rules-based order. With other Members, on a cross-party basis, I wrote to the Foreign Secretary earlier this year to impress on him that that strategy must address the key challenges that arise from conflicts such as those in Syria and Yemen.

In Yemen, the Group of Eminent Experts has found violations of international humanitarian law by all sides. The bombing of civilians and civilian infrastructure surely warrants consistent and clear condemnation and independent investigation. As the penholder on Yemen, surely the United Kingdom should be a neutral broker. The previous Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), showed real leadership on Yemen; I urge the Government to maintain that UK leadership.

The idea of leadership applies more widely, because we are in an era in which tragically the United States is retreating from its role as a defender of the rules-based system. Human rights should surely be the foundation of a fair, open and transparent society. I say strongly to the Government that, with an increasing void created

by that American retreat, the defence of human rights and the rule of law must be at the heart of our policy—even more so than before.

Let me cite the particular example of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. President Obama made LGBT rights a pillar of his foreign policy, but that work is being undone by President Trump. Let me take just one example of the challenges that we still face: last week, a member of the Ugandan Government again suggested the introduction of the death penalty for gay sex. I urge the Minister to set out what the Government are doing to press Uganda to withdraw this appalling proposal.

The Ugandan announcement is not an isolated incident: we see growing authoritarianism around the world and a shrinking of civic space. In Hong Kong, we have seen protest leaders jailed, savage beatings and the firing of live rounds against demonstrators. Under the Sino-British joint declaration, Hong Kong residents were promised a range of civil rights; it is extremely difficult to argue that the treaty has not been breached. Surely it is now time to declare that China is in breach of its international obligations and to press the Chinese to change their position.

As we face great crises—on displacement, the climate emergency and widening inequality—the case for multilateralism is stronger, not weaker. I praise the commitments that the Department for International Development showed last week to replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It is estimated that that fund has saved 27 million lives, making a real difference around the world. None the less, we need coherence in our policy. In Yemen, we have seen the real difference that aid has made, but our role there is a paradox of aid and arms in that we support Yemen on humanitarian relief and yet we are one of the main suppliers of arms to one side of the conflict. We need to address that. I now struggle with the Government's suggestion that we have a system of arms control that is one of the most rigorous and robust in the world. I no longer believe that we can genuinely say that. We need to address this issue as a matter of urgency, and one of the ways that we can do that is to improve parliamentary oversight by making the Committees on Arms Export Controls a stand-alone Select Committee focused solely on that issue.

Finally, let me say something about DFID and our aid commitment of 0.7%. As colleagues from all parts of the House have said, that commitment is widely applauded internationally. We are a development superpower and, arguably, that is our greatest asset when it comes to exercising soft power. We should be proud of it and we should reaffirm it. I welcome the Queen's Speech commitment to ensure that all girls have access to 12 years of quality education. The UK's commitment at the General Assembly to investment in education is hugely welcome and positive, but we must address the particular needs of those who are displaced—those who are living as refugees or who are internally displaced. In particular, let us not forget the Rohingya people. It is now more than two years since 1 million people fled from Rakhine State to Bangladesh. We need to address their humanitarian needs, but we also need to hold the Burmese military to account. I urge the Government to be more proactive on this in the United Nations. Let us use this debate today to reject isolationism, reject any movement away from multilateralism and demonstrate our commitment to those shared values.

5.1 pm

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). He focused his speech on values. By and large, foreign policy around the world is viewed through three prisms: prosperity, security and values. I, Madam Deputy Speaker, want to touch on the issue of values.

Our Queen's Speech made it very clear that the United Kingdom will stand up for its values. Those values could be the rule of law, justice, liberty or freedom. I was surprised to see that the freedom of religion or belief was not in the Queen's Speech. This Government—our Government—asked the Bishop of Truro to commission a report into the persecution of Christians around the world to see, first, whether the Foreign Office understood the scale of the issue at hand and then how we can address it. That was our report. The Government accepted the 22 different recommendations that were in that review.

There can be no compromise on article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

It says “his”. It should also say “hers”, but we should remember that this was in 1948. Why is this important to me? I came to this country from Pakistan in 1984. My father was an imam, my grandfather was an imam, and my uncles were imams. When I arrived, I could not speak a word of English. I moved to my constituency of Gillingham and Rainham. My father, my sisters and I were able freely and openly to practise our faith in our great country. There is now a moral obligation on me and others who are part of minority religious faiths in this great country to stand up for individuals who are being persecuted for their faith in their countries of origin or elsewhere where they are a part of minority religious communities. That is why, for me, there can be no compromise on freedom of religion or belief. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for appointing me, on 12 September, his special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. This is what the Prime Minister said:

“People across the world deserve the chance to practise their beliefs freely. I'm delighted to appoint Rehman as my new Special Envoy and look forward to him building on the important work we have already done on this issue. The UK will always be a passionate advocate for greater tolerance, respect and understanding internationally.”

I am grateful to him for that appointment. Let me make it clear that I will carry out my duties without fear or favour. Yes, I am the Prime Minister's special envoy and I also report to the Foreign Secretary at the Foreign Office, where I am based, but as somebody who is committed to freedom of religion or belief I look to colleagues across the House.

There were parliamentarians from across this House, led by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, at the canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman at the Holy See. I am a Muslim, but I stood there and listened to what that great man stood for; and I consider him to be my saint too, because of those values. There can be no compromise on freedom of religion or belief.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My hon. Friend is speaking powerfully about freedom of religion or belief. As he knows, my Committee is looking to take evidence in an inquiry on this subject in the coming weeks. Will he speak for a moment about the importance of the Foreign Office in supporting freedom of religion or belief? For example, his own work defending Asia Bibi in Pakistan and speaking up for Coptic Christians in Egypt has been extremely important to many of us.

Rehman Chishti: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Committee. I look to his work for guidance because across the House Members of Parliament are respected for their expertise, understanding and credibility, and he demonstrated that on the Asia Bibi case, when he held the Government to account for not doing the right thing. I thank him for standing up for our British values. I resigned from the Government over that case because I did not agree with the way in which it was handled, and the current Prime Minister supported me. If the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee wants me to give evidence as the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, I would be more than happy to do so—subject to the rules and criteria of the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister's office.

I have tendered my terms of reference—eight objectives and 27 terms—to the Prime Minister in order to carry out my work. I have met and listened to brilliant British and international non-governmental organisations such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Aid to the Church in Need and Open Doors. I have also met diplomats from across a number of different countries and parliamentarians from Nigeria, and I now look forward to meeting the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to take this work forward.

CSW's website states that 83% of the world's population live in nations where religious freedom is threatened or banned. How can that possibly be right? We are talking about countries in east Asia, Latin America, the middle east, north Africa, south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; there is persecution across the world. The Bishop of Truro's report makes it very clear that Christians are the most persecuted faith in the world, and that freedom of religion for everyone should be a priority for countries around the world.

I should make a declaration of interest. Before going to the Vatican for three days, I was in Bahrain for over 36 hours, where I met His Majesty King Hamad and looked at the Bahrain declaration. For the two days that I stayed there, the Government of Bahrain provided my accommodation before I went on transit to the Vatican. That happened last week and will be on the Register of Members' Financial Interests within the timescale. On my visit, I made it clear that we need to work with countries such as Bahrain—which has had churches since 1823 and a Hindu temple for 200 years—along with other international partners.

Before I delivered my terms, I met communities that are persecuted around the world. Here in the UK, I met the British Ahmadiyya Muslim community and the Baha'i community, and listened to them talk about the persecution they face. Working with individuals across the board, I will ensure that freedom of religion is pushed at every possible level.

Let me finally pay tribute to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who has done immense work over the past 40 years on inter-faith dialogue—theological debate and discussion is how we are going to deal with intolerance. I say to colleagues from across the House that I look towards them so that we can have these frank discussions and take this vital work forward, because every citizen has a right to practise their faith openly and freely.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am afraid that there is a lot of pressure on time, so I will reduce the limit to six minutes.

5.9 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the fine words of the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), who I am sure will do great things in the role he has been given by the Prime Minister. He marked himself out early on with his campaign to use the term “Daesh” as opposed to “ISIL” or “ISIS” at the time when we were both elected, so all the best from me to him for that. However, I do fear that the Government have become somewhat complacent, in different theatres around the world, in trying to uphold many of the values that he spoke of.

I want to focus on defence and security, primarily security. I start with what is happening right now in Syria with regard to Turkey. This morning, we had one of the most pressing urgent questions answered by the Foreign Secretary in the most languid and complacent fashion. I think I am being charitable in saying that when met with such criminal behaviour on the part of Turkey, the Government can only go so far as to say that they will ban new arms exports where that infrastructure may be used by Turkey in northern Syria and that they will keep a rolling eye on the matter. They will not even go so far as to argue muscularly for any sanctions on Turkey. Worse, the Defence Secretary appeared to lend support to the Turkish claim of legitimacy in moving into northern Syria. What a disgrace that is.

Then we look at Hong Kong, from where we can all take some inspiration. Thirty years on from the Baltic Way, that amazing signature of human triumph for freedom and liberty and the rule of law over the iron fist of the then Soviet Union has been emulated beautifully, in the most grotesque circumstances, by the people of Hong Kong standing up to one of the world's most authoritarian and brutal regimes. If we ask ourselves what on earth the UK Government are doing in that regard, it sounds like a lot of warm and feisty words on their part but very little when it comes to any meaningful action. Another example is Saudi Arabia—a country that saw the chopping up of a journalist in one of its own embassies earlier this year. The Crown Prince said only last week that it was down to him that that happened, and we have had barely a finger raised by the British Government.

Of course, as the Minister and other Members might expect me to, I come on to the issue of Russia and Ukraine. December this year marks 25 years since the signing of the Budapest memorandum on security assurances, to which the Government are a signatory. That memorandum, frankly, lies in complete and utter tatters. I do not say

that to diminish what the UK Government do to support Ukraine, of which they do a lot and of which they can be proud, but let us think about what is going on in that country—an illegal annexation in Crimea and the overtaking of its eastern border, in the Donbass region, by its neighbour, Russia.

Given all the things I have mentioned so far, whether it is what is happening in Hong Kong, in Syria, in Ukraine or in Saudi Arabia, the Kremlin must be licking its lips and be unable to believe its luck in the way the international order that so many Members speak about here week in, week out is falling apart—and it is falling apart. I say to Members of this House, particularly to Members whom I often disagree with but respect none the less, that what we have seen happen in this country and elsewhere with the attacks on the rule of law and on the norms that keep us safe and secure will continue to happen. If they think that the unravelling of the European Union was enough for these people, I can tell them that it was not. If they think that NATO is not a future target for unravelling by Russia and others who would buy into that agenda in this country, they should believe me that it is. I urge them to step out of the complacency that they find themselves slumbered in.

The Prime Minister spoke yesterday at the Dispatch Box about how much he admires the capitalist free market and the rules-based system, which has delivered peace and prosperity across Europe, but the Queen's Speech undoes the very instruments that underpin that prosperity, such as freedom of movement. Where once stood closed economies in closed societies under communism and Nazism now stands free markets, which this Government are walking away from. For shame, I say to that.

It is hardly a global Britain that anyone can be proud of. If it was a real global Britain, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe would not be perishing in an Iranian dungeon. If it was a real global Britain, the wives of US military personnel would not be hiding under the terms of diplomatic immunity, having run over a British citizen here on UK soil. It is not global Britain in my name.

5.15 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I am proud that this Government are ending the postcode lottery and ensuring fairer funding for our schools, which I have led on in this place. I know that many Members across the House were looking for a fairer funding formula, and we have got it in this Queen's Speech. The schools in my constituency will hugely welcome this injection of funds. St Albans schools will now see an increase in funding above the new minimum levels of per pupil funding. The average amount in St Albans will be £5,161 per secondary school pupil and £4,123 per primary school pupil. I welcome that.

I was also pleased to hear the Prime Minister say yesterday in response to my intervention that this Government are committed to protecting parental choice and respecting diversity within our education system. That includes private schools. It is worth noting that our country welcomes 55,280 overseas students as of January 2019. I welcome the announcement that those students can now stay for two years after graduation, because it means that they can contribute to our economy. Many foreign young people also attend our excellent

private schools. Private schools generate billions of pounds for the UK economy, support thousands of jobs and contribute significantly to tax revenues. Trashing that, as the Labour party wants to do, is wrong. I have in my constituency what is believed to be the oldest private school—St Albans School—and I am meeting parents and the headteacher of St Albans High School for Girls this Friday. They are extremely worried about this act of vandalism, and many people have asked me, "Which charity will be next on the hit-list?" We need to think about that.

I am pleased that, by March 2021, the local growth fund will have invested £12 billion in projects to boost jobs and growth across England. The fund has made projects such as the Hertfordshire enterprise zone possible, creating 8,000 new jobs. However, I will still be pressing for a review of business rates, because the current model based on property values is not fit for the modern business economy. It also allows too many online retailers to escape paying their way, which is wrong.

The Environment Bill is a flagship policy for this Government, and I welcome the proposals in the Queen's Speech. In St Albans, like in many areas across the country, we have air quality management areas, including one at the Peahen junction. These polluted areas have been subject to this designation for years, and it is time we had an audit of where these areas are and how long they have had this designation. Simply recording the pollution with no obligation on local authorities to deal with the problem and eradicate the pollution is not good enough. We need to know the extent of the problem.

I will be pressing for the inclusion of noise pollution in the Environment Bill, as it seems to be overlooked by many of those campaigning for our environment. I missed the first part of the debate because I was meeting the aviation Minister. My constituency has big problems with noise pollution from Luton airport, and I was pleased to hear that the aviation Minister will be looking into that matter. Noise pollution, whether from roads or flights, blights lives.

Today's debate is about our place in the world. As the only major country that is simultaneously meeting the NATO target of spending 2% of our GDP on defence and the UN target of spending 0.7% of our gross national income on international development, we hold our heads high in the world. Bangladesh, in which I take a particular interest, received £190 million in development funds from the UK in 2018. I was pleased that the Secretary of State announced in September an extra £87 million for the Rohingya, which is truly welcomed by the people languishing in those camps as a result of persecution.

A lot of funding from DFID goes to democracy strengthening, including in Bangladesh, which is a young country; it is nearly its 50th anniversary. Emerging countries must learn that if faith is lost in the democratic process, through dodgy elections or broken promises, the whole future of electoral participation will be lost.

It is worth noting that many people have said, "Well, the last referendum has not been delivered", which prompts the question why anyone would want to participate fully in another referendum. I am pleased that the Prime Minister is willing to try to deliver on the loud voice of this country: the country voted to leave. No one can argue that the 2016 referendum was poorly interacted with; it was a huge exercise in democracy,

[Mrs Anne Main]

with 33.5 million people voting, and many have told me that they voted for the first time. It was a democratic instruction to the Government of the day. This was not about political allegiances; it crossed political divides. Since then, this House has failed them. We have retreated to our political corners, and that is not good. Political posturing means that this House is putting party before country now and refusing to back a deal, with some in this House doing so without even seeing it.

Even worse than this is that we now have a party trashing the concept of democracy by threatening to ignore the democratic mandate, and actually overturn and revoke it. That position has been described by the leader of the Greens, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), as

“arrogant, self-indulgent, cynical and very dangerous”.

Hear, hear. If we cannot deliver on what the British people have said, why will anyone ever trust any of us again? The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), who leads the Liberal Democrats, said in 2008 that they were being gagged when they wanted an in/out referendum. Now she likes to hold the title of “Democrats” in her party name, but any party that refuses to acknowledge and try to carry out the direct democratic mandate of the people should lose the right to call themselves democrats. If the PM comes back with a deal, we all owe it to the 33 million voters to think very long and hard about how we will vote. Narrow party politics does not have a place in this decision.

5.21 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I say to the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) that, when she reflects on the referendum, she may want to reflect on why the 3.5 million people who will be most affected by that referendum were not actually allowed to take part in it and whether the will of the people therefore reflected the full will of the people in the country?

A debate on the place of Britain in the world cannot happen without considering the impact that Brexit will have on the UK economy. As a country, our place in the world will be greatly affected by whether we are weaker, poorer and more isolated following Brexit than we would otherwise have been. The Secretary of State for International Development would I am sure, had he been here now, have accused me of being negative. I suggest that his positivity often merges into delusion about all the benefits he claims he can see from Brexit. I want to focus on that.

It is certainly worth considering the forecasts that were made three years ago about where we would now be in relation to Brexit. I accept that some statements were made immediately before the vote by George Osborne and the Treasury that, frankly, I was not willing to go on TV and repeat because I thought they were outrageous. However, if we look at what has happened in the last three years and at the predictions made by the Bank of England, the Office for Budget Responsibility, private sector consensus and Economists for Brexit, asking which assessments or analyses hold up three years on, the one that is way out is of course the one made by Economists for Brexit. They predicted that the UK economy would have grown much more significantly

than was the case. That is why the predictions made by those different organisations are worth bearing in mind and worth considering when we are trying to work out where we might be should we end up with Brexit, particularly with the Brexit proposals that our Prime Minister has been touting.

In the joint statement in 2016, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Centre for Economic Performance and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research predicted that the impact of leaving the EU might leave the UK economy 8% smaller by 2030 than if we had voted to remain. They predicted that the economy would be between 1% and 3% smaller by 2020. It is a fact that the UK's economy is 1.5% smaller now than was forecast by the Bank of England back in May 2016. So their predictions seem to be pretty much spot on. If they are correct, the UK economy will be 8% smaller by 2030 than had we stayed in the European Union.

So when we have a Secretary of State who promotes the so-called economic benefits of Brexit, it is rather disappointing that they do not actually fit with what the analyses suggest will happen. I agree with the point made by Chris Giles, an economist who writes in *The Financial Times*, who summarises the impact of Brexit, even with a deal, as follows:

“It is not empty shelves and huge job losses, but a slow drip of lost opportunities, activity moved elsewhere and income disappointments. The correct analogy is Britain's slow, 30-year, relative decline from victor in the second world war to the sick man of Europe, not the immediate pain of a recession or a financial crisis.”

Christian Schulz, the chief economist at Citi has worked out that

“The UK economy is already around £60 billion smaller than it would have been without a vote to leave the European Union”.

When people talk about figures on the side of a bus, perhaps the figure that they should bear in mind is a £60 billion loss to the value of the UK economy.

Other indicators are not exactly hunky-dory in the way that the Secretary of State indicated. So, yes, it is true that the number of jobs has increased, but it is also true that business investment is 20% lower, foreign direct investment is at a six-year low and there has been a 35% drop in manufacturing FDI. I tried to make that point to the Prime Minister, who was in receipt of a letter from five manufacturing sectors saying that his deal would cause them huge damage. When I explained that that was what they had written to him, for some reason he seemed to take that as an indication that I should support his deal. The key manufacturing sectors of aerospace, aviation, food and drink and chemicals have written to the Prime Minister saying that his deal will badly damage them, and he says that that is a reason to vote for his deal. Perhaps he was not listening or he did not understand what I said; I am not sure which of the two it is. All the other assessments, including the Government's own, point to the Prime Minister's deal leaving us between £2,000 and £2,500 worse off per capita every year.

The most optimistic scenario, even with no net contributions to the EU budget, is that we will be £16 billion worse off. That is why the only way out of this mess is for the decision to be put back to the people. Let us have a people's vote, and then we can decide whether to proceed with what the Government want us to do or to stay in the European Union.

5.28 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who by the end of this process must surely deserve some kind of award for finding so many different ways to say exactly the same thing in every speech that he gives. I am sure that he will be saying it again on Saturday when we are back here.

Yesterday the Government set out a well overdue Queen's Speech putting forward a positive agenda to move our country forward, and it is absolutely right that we move on from the last Session of Parliament, one of the longest in our history and one that was dominated by Brexit, to start looking at governing on the issues that matter to our constituents in their day-to-day lives—health, policing, education, strengthening the Union, improving our environment and increasing opportunities for everyone in our country. I hope that this week we will at last be able to move on even slightly, look beyond Brexit and start putting this much-needed and positive agenda into action.

My constituents are tired of the divisive and endless going around in circles on Brexit, and that is even in a seat that voted 75% to remain in the European Union back in 2016. They are tired, they are fed up and they want Brexit to be sorted. But I do not want to focus on Brexit today. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) spoke eloquently earlier on that subject. I want instead to focus on some of the specific measures in the Queen's Speech that speak to some of the priorities that I have been pursuing down here in Westminster.

I want to start by thanking the Government for including my ten-minute rule Bill on collective defined-contribution schemes in the pension schemes Bill. The consultation had already closed, but to have that commitment in proposed legislation is very welcome. It is a good measure, backed by industry and trade unions, that will make a positive difference to help workplace pensions evolve in a way that will be sustainable for business and provide better outcomes for employees. Crucially, the pension schemes Bill will also include the pensions dashboard. One of the biggest enemies for pension savers is the lack of data. Being able to pull together all an individual's pension savings in one place will make a huge difference, as will greater teeth for the regulator, with more powers to tackle irresponsible management by companies of private pension schemes.

It seems like a lifetime ago, but the first question I asked in Prime Minister's questions was about a horrible event that happened in Barrhead, where a Romanian national attacked and raped a schoolgirl. The Home Secretary and the Prime Minister both committed to that individual being removed from the United Kingdom as soon as possible, either after serving all his sentence or to finish serving his sentence in Romania. One thing that struck the community was that the guy who committed the attack was fairly young and there was concern that he might be able to come back in future. I was therefore really pleased to see the foreign national offenders Bill in the Queen's Speech. Among other things, it will make it far harder for people who are deported from the United Kingdom as a result of a criminal offence to come back. Those who do breach deportation orders will face much harsher penalties for doing so.

Another issue I raised in Prime Minister's question time related to another tragic case in which a 13-year-old boy in my constituency took his own life after being severely cyber-bullied. Since then, I have done a huge amount of work with charities and stakeholders across the sector, as have other Members from across the House, on cyber-bullying, suicide and self-harm prevention, particularly among young people. The online harms White Paper was a really important piece of cross-Government work. It included something that I and others have campaigned for: a statutory duty of care on social media providers to help to protect users online. The commitment in the Queen's Speech to introduce legislation on that as soon as possible is very welcome. Talking about Britain's place in the world, I know it meant a great deal that the Prime Minister used his speech at the United Nations General Assembly to champion the UK's work on online safety. If we can get on with that work, it will make a huge amount of difference.

I want to briefly mention the medical devices Bill in relation to the work I have been doing on the victims of transvaginal mesh, one of the greatest medical scandals of recent times. The whole process has shown that the licensing regime for medical devices and the work of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is completely not fit for purpose. The Bill will come too late to help women whose lives have been destroyed by mesh, but hopefully ensuring that we update legislation relating to medical devices in response to patient safety concerns will at least stop similar scandals coming forward in future.

I appreciate that probably very little of the Queen's Speech will actually come into force. We will need an election for that to happen, but so be it. I am certainly ready for that. I know there are a number of measures outlined in the Queen's Speech that do not apply in Scotland, but my constituents would like them to. The First Minister of Scotland gave her party conference speech today in Aberdeen without mentioning healthcare or education once. My constituents will want to know why their ambition for public services is not being met north of the border. There will be a £1.2 billion cash bonus as a result of the latest spending round, and my constituents expect the Scottish Government to spend every single penny exactly where it is needed.

I am really looking forward to taking forward this modern Conservative and Unionist agenda to the people of East Renfrewshire in the upcoming general election. They do not want a second independence referendum; they want Brexit sorted and they want this Government to get on with delivering their priorities. I look forward to supporting the Queen's Speech next week.

5.34 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): This debate is titled "Britain's place in the world". I would argue that our armed forces in the UK are a cornerstone in defining our place in the world. I put on record my thanks, and I think the thanks of the House, to the men and women who serve in our armed forces to keep us safe 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

It was quite surprising that there was very little about defence in the Gracious Speech. There was a single line—that the

"Government will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces"—

[Mr Kevan Jones]

and yesterday, the Prime Minister re-announced the £2.2 billion that was announced a few weeks ago in the spending review. Our armed forces and our defence budget face a financial crisis. There is a morale crisis among members of our armed forces, and a strategic drift on the way forward for them. That should have been addressed in the Queen's Speech, but it was not.

Since 2010, the coalition Government and the Conservative Government have cut the defence budget by between 16% and 22%. That has led to aircraft carriers without aircraft and no, or little, capability for anti-submarine warfare, for example. We have an Army of 72,000—the smallest since 1850—and a Navy that has been cut to 30,000 personnel. We have ships that can no longer take to sea because of a lack of personnel. We are told that that £2.2 billion will somehow fund our future needs, but if we look at that announcement, we see that £700 million of it goes straight away on underfunded pension contributions and that a large chunk of it is the drawdown that was already there for the nuclear deterrent, so it does not really address the financial crisis that we face.

We can add to that the National Audit Office report from November last year, which said that the equipment plan is unaffordable by £7 billion over the next 10 years, rising to £14.8 billion if the funding is not brought forward. More importantly, 84% of the identified challenge with the equipment plan falls within the next four years.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree—I think he does—that it is about time that the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury switched to multi-year defence agreements?

Mr Jones: We were promised that but it has not happened, and that needs to be looked at. The real issue, which I will come to, is our ability not only to afford this, but to know where we are going.

Added to that is the crisis in our defence procurement. In reaction to limited budgets, we are now buying off the shelf from abroad—mainly from the United States—which is not only leading to a hollowing-out of technology and jobs that could be in the UK, but adding to costs. I did not want to mention Brexit in this debate but I have to, because it has a direct effect on the equipment budget. The MOD has contract liability of some \$35 billion. Last year, exchange rate losses cost it £620 million, and that could rise to some £800 million or £900 million a year. Buying off the shelf might seem very cheap for the Treasury, but it has long-term implications for the hollowing out of our defence industries, and the foreign exchange risk means that we are spending a huge amount of money that could train, for example, some 9,000 soldiers a year or fund a main frontline frigate in our Royal Navy.

We then have the ludicrous situation, still ongoing, whereby the MOD is continuing this nonsense of putting the fleet solid support vessel out to international tender—it is currently under tender—and arguing that that will somehow be in the interests of not only the taxpayer but UK plc. That dangerous trend is having an effect not only on our sovereign capability to provide these pieces of equipment for our armed forces, but on jobs and technology. It makes common sense to invest in

UK plc. The fleet solid support vessel contract could sustain jobs in the UK, if there was the commitment to do that. It is no good trying to hide behind EU procurement rules, as the Government try to do, because no other European nation seems to do it.

This crisis seems to have been completely ignored in the Gracious Speech. Without some fundamental thinking about the equipment plan and what we want to do in defence as a nation, the crisis will continue, and so too will the pressure on individual members of the armed forces. Instead of this smoke-and-mirrors approach to defence funding, it would have been nice to see a full commitment in the Gracious Speech to a fundamental defence and security review. That would mean making some hard choices, but it would not only be better for the industry and members of our armed forces to have some certainty about the future; it would help to define our role in the world—what we can do, what we want to do and what we should do.

5.40 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the many speakers who have not followed the early trend of continuing the long-running saga of “Carry On Brexit” but have really contributed to this debate on Britain's role in the world. I am grateful to them for having shone light on so many aspects of it.

I want to touch on our place in a wider and changing world, to which there are several ingredients we need to be aware of. The first is that America is different from what it was. Its unremitted focus on making America great has reduced its previous role as a liberalising influence in the world, spreading democracy. Instead we see it leaving difficult, long-term situations and often leaving a vacuum for wildly unsuccessful regimes—but it remains our essential partner for so much in the world.

Then there is China, using its size, muscle, foreign exchange reserves and buying clout to shape its growing power around the world, with ambitions to lead and dominate. We will need continued engagement and principled disagreement in equal measure in our relationship with China. While these two giants wrestle like York and Lancaster or Rome and Carthage in times past, the rest of the world does not want to take sides. As Apple has found, being neutral is not always easy, and our role is surely to be close to both, even when we wish to criticise.

Then there is the EU, still the world's largest trading bloc. It will remain our single largest trading partner for a long time to come and a key partner for security and much more besides. As we divorce, we must never forget this. Then there is Asia, more secure, more democratic and with a much larger middle class than ever before: consumers for our goods, services, education, health, innovation and technology. We should surely be focusing more of our resource, students and thinking on how we can work with Asia.

The Commonwealth, often the underappreciated “C” in FCO, is a powerful network for good, interconnectivity and mobilising for great causes, whether tackling malaria, eye treatment or girls' education. I worry, however, about Her Majesty's Opposition's attitude to the Commonwealth. This is not something modern. When William Hague took over as Foreign Secretary in 2010,

he was the first Foreign Secretary to visit Australia for 13 years and the first to visit New Zealand for 30. We must never take either the Five Eyes intelligence arrangements or the Commonwealth relationships for granted.

Overall, we face a world that is richer, more aware and more fractious. There are more economic migrants than ever before, which is raising issues not even seen after the displacements of two world wars. For the first time since 1989, when the Berlin wall came down, the world has seen the democracy index go to negative. We must work to change that.

Mrs Main: On the democracy index, does my hon. Friend share my concern about how negative it is to pledge a referendum and then just ask for another referendum, not having delivered on the first? Why should people participate in democratic processes when they are ignored?

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the case of a direct act of democracy like a referendum, it is incredibly important to accept the result.

That brings me to a handful of suggestions for the Government. We need, first, an umbrella or co-ordinating role for the Foreign Office, with independent International Trade and International Development Departments, but with a Foreign Secretary who is above them all, with £14 billion-worth of development in one pocket and free trade agreements and market access relations in the other. We need a new democracy fund—no doubt financed largely by the International Development Department—to help us to work with partners across the world. Those with our democratic values are much less likely to be in conflict with each other.

We need, as the Prime Minister said, to step up our environmental leadership. The 2020 UN climate change conference in Glasgow—I do not like using the term “COP26”, which sounds like a futuristic police state drama—will give us an opportunity to demonstrate how we can work with the rest of the world on those incredibly important issues.

We need to ensure that our prosperity fund is not just about making partner nations prosperous, but about using our innovation to find creative solutions to problems such as plastic on beaches across Asia, which is not only bad for the environment but bad for the tourism industries and economies of those countries.

We must recognise the value of our armed forces. Whether they are peacekeeping or fighting disease, they are always ready for conflict and always available to help to train personnel. That is one of the things that make us stand out in the world. We also have 25 trade envoys, an innovation brought in by the former Prime Minister David Cameron. I think I am the longest-serving trade envoy in the House of Commons: next month it will be eight years since I was appointed. What this shows more than anything else is that in the business of business, relationships do matter. Ministers come and Ministers go, but trade envoys can be there for a long time, and that can be valuable.

Then there is the issue of our relationship with Europe. It seems to me, quite simply, that we must resolve what that is going to be, and then focus on how we can do more across the world. I should particularly like the

Government to think more about the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and what more we can do with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The same applies to other continents with which I am less involved, such as Latin America and Africa.

The Prime Minister’s Queen’s Speech called for the UK to play a major role in global affairs, with multilateral diplomacy, trade engagement, and sustainable policies that are right for our planet in this age. We must recognise that the world needs and wants our experience and skills, and our reputation for quality. That is why, for example, Cambridge Assessments examines more than 1 million people every year in China. It is why Prudential has more than 270,000 agents offering health insurance to people in Indonesia. It is why there is British design in nearly every major airport in the world, and it is why half the businesses that accompanied the previous Prime Minister on a trip to China—I was with her—had not existed five years earlier. They were innovative, they were about tech, and the world wants them. The opportunity is there, and we must seize it.

5.48 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Let me start with some good news. Last Thursday, I used Parliament’s brief Prorogation to visit the remarkable Perseid School in my constituency, a school for children with severe learning difficulties that has just been judged “outstanding” by Ofsted for the fourth consecutive time. As part of its consistent excellence, Perseid has been a key player in a groundbreaking project delivered by the fantastic charity SeeAbility, which calls for full sight tests and glasses to be dispensed to children at their schools rather than in the high street or in a hospital.

Why is that important? Because children with a learning disability are 28 times more likely than other children to have a serious sight problem. In the UK, one of the highest populations at risk of poor vision is that of people with learning disabilities, and the majority of children with severe or profound learning disabilities attend special schools. In fact, nearly half of the children in such schools have a vision problem, and nearly one third need glasses. Those clear health inequalities have led the NHS to commit itself to a new programme of eye care for all special needs schools, which will bring eye care and glasses to more than 120,000 children once it is up and running. It is hoped that the scheme will be launched in spring 2020, and the commitment to improve healthcare for all people with learning disabilities and autism in the NHS 10-year long-term plan should help drive this change forward. I congratulate wholeheartedly both SeeAbility and Perseid for driving the changes, and may I take a moment also to credit the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who used his power and position while Minister at the Department of Health and Social Care to help make this difference? Will the Minister today signal support for the scheme progressing as planned by NHS England and for it being a continued priority for secondary legislation among all that has been announced in the Queen’s Speech?

Moving from the good news to the bad, there are now 1.2 million families across our country on the ever-expanding housing waiting list, but just 6,464 new

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

social homes were built in 2017-18. That is the lowest figure on record and at this rate it would take 172 years to give everyone on the current waiting list a social rented home. Meanwhile, there are 83,700 households trapped in temporary accommodation, costing the taxpayer an eye-watering £1 billion per year—every single penny badly spent. All corners of this Chamber accept that we are in the heart of a housing crisis, yet other than

“laws to implement new building safety standards”—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 14 October 2019; Vol. 800, c. 2.*]—

there was not a single word to combat the housing crisis in the Queen’s Speech, not one.

Of course a building safety regulator is welcome, but it is only part of the housing regulation that is required. Anyone who has visited the B&Bs, hostels and warehouses that are “temporarily” housing homeless families will know of their often appalling standard and squalor. We have Ofsted for schools and the Care Quality Commission for healthcare; is it not time that we had a regulator to oversee the temporary accommodation for the 124,000 children who are homeless in our country?

Finally, the topic of today’s debate is “Britain’s Place in the World” and in the Queen’s Speech we were told that the Government will

“ensure that it continues to play a leading role in global affairs, defending its interests and promoting its values”—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 14 October 2019; Vol. 800, c. 3.*]

What could possibly be more reflective of Britain’s place in the world and our leading role in global affairs than our response to a humanitarian disaster unfolding upon one of our allies because of one of our allies? I refer, of course, to the Kurds, deserted by the United States despite their immense sacrifice as our allies in the battle against ISIS.

One week into the Turkish assaults on the Kurds and we have seen executions, assassinations of female politicians, the escape of ISIS detainees and, this weekend, a targeted attack on a civilian convoy which included international journalists. Reports yesterday even indicated that a Kurdish politician was raped and stoned to death by advancing Turkish forces. Meanwhile, the fate of thousands of IS prisoners being guarded by Kurdish-led forces becomes of paramount concern, and a refugee crisis develops before our very eyes.

Surely the foundation of a supposed special relationship is having the clarity, courage and conviction to speak out when something is wrong. The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, the right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), said at the Dispatch Box last week that the placement of US troops is a matter for the US, but what message does that send to our allies around the world—that this is how the UK will abandon you?

In 2014, the Prime Minister wrote an article in the *Telegraph* headlined “It would be an utter tragedy if we did not defend the Kurds”. Five years on and, on his watch, the Kurds now feel safer turning to Putin and Assad, having lost faith in our international coalition. The abandonment of the Kurds betrays their sacrifice, bringing shame on America and all of us who are their friends, speaking volumes about Britain’s place in the world.

5.53 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Many speakers in the debate have made the point that this whole Queen’s Speech is unusual because this is a minority Government who do not have an automatic majority for their proposals—indeed that is arithmetically correct. However, when I was pondering the absurdity I just had to look at the Opposition Benches. First, we have Labour Members, who say that they want an election, that Parliament is not working and that we do not have a majority and yet they refuse to vote for an election. They say that they want to deliver Brexit, yet they will not vote for any agreement. They also say they are opposed to no deal, but they will not vote for a deal that would prevent that from happening.

Then we have the Liberal Democrats. They have bet the house, the car, the pension and everything on Brexit chaos, saying that they want to revoke the result of the referendum, which most fair-minded people inside or outside this place regard as illiberal and undemocratic.

Tom Brake: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bim Afolami: No, I will not.

Then we have the Scottish National party Members, who argue for a referendum on Scottish independence—that has been their long-standing position and it is a perfectly legitimate thing to argue for—but I do not know why they bother, because they refuse to accept the referendum that happened in 2014 and the referendum on the European Union in 2016. Why they think another referendum in Scotland would get them what they want, I do not really know, unless it were to be delivered, which they do not seem to like doing.

This is an unusual Queen’s Speech, and that brings me to Britain’s place in the world. I occasionally like to read, and I have been reading the recent book by Lord Waldegrave, from the other place, entitled “Three Circles into One”. I do not agree with everything that he says in the book, but he clearly outlines the narrative of this country’s post-war settlement. That settlement is that we have three circles of influence: the Commonwealth; our special relationship with the United States; and our relationship with Europe and membership of the European Union. That is a unique place for Britain; no other country has those three circles.

Lord Waldegrave, despite the fact that he is open about the fact he voted remain, as I did, at the referendum, says that one of the reasons that Brexit occurred is that the third circle—the European circle—was based around an untruth. That untruth, which was told to the British people for generations, was that they should not worry about the European Union—or the EEC, or whatever it was—because it was only a trading relationship, an economic relationship, and that it did not have a political narrative. People were told that we were not trying for a federal system, and that there was no such thing as ever closer union. Eventually, over time, the British public saw that narrative to be untrue. That is not to say that the narrative is illegitimate. There will be many people on both sides of the House who happen to think that Britain being part of a greater Europe is a good thing, and there is nothing wrong with that view. However, that was not what was told to the British people over the generations. In my judgment, Lord Waldegrave is right

when he says that that third circle of Britain's influence and place in the world has fallen away because of the Brexit vote.

If we accept the terms of the Brexit vote, as I believe it is incumbent on all Members to do, we need to have an alternative narrative—an alternative way of describing Britain's place in the world. We need to use our unique strengths, including our legal system, the City of London, our language, our time zone and our welcoming and open culture. Those unique strengths could make us the world's marketplace, the world's souk, the world's Speakers' Corner.

We have spoken a lot about trade, but I do not believe that trade is the most fundamental aspect of this. Our political weight in the world is still strong, our soft power is still strong, and we are an aid superpower. We are not a superpower in all respects, but we are an aid superpower. Our relationships across the world are strong: our diplomats and our companies are respected all over the world. If we can be the place where the three circles—the Commonwealth, the United States and Europe—can interact to place themselves in the centre of the world in the welcoming, open, dynamic, forward-thinking, free-trading country that is Britain, that is a future.

I would like to finish by referring to the Secretary of State for International Development's remarks around aid. Recently, I was in Uganda with a charity called Harpenden Spotlight on Africa, working to improve health and education in a particularly poor rural part of Uganda. I cannot express how positively they viewed this country or how much they respected the work that we do and the partnership that we have. We had the Ugandan Minister of Health coming to that small village to see the work we were doing. If only more people in this House and in this country could see that, they would realise that our aid relationship in particular can help to strengthen our three circles and Britain's place in the world for many years to come.

6 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I suppose, like many other hon. Members, I approach this debate by asking: "What are the implications and consequences of these proposals for the people who elected me and sent me to this place to speak for them?"

This Queen's Speech is a mixed bag of 26 Bills; some of them will not apply to the people I represent or to Scotland, and for that I am eternally grateful. The Government in England may want to go on trying to break records in terms of the proportion of its population that they can put behind bars, and locking up more people for longer, but in Scotland we will be free to pursue policies that tackle the reasons behind crime and build social cohesion, and to have the policy aspiration, at least, of reducing our prison population.

Other proposals are probably well-meaning. No doubt laudable action is proposed on the environment, but I expect that by the time we get to see those actions—if we do—we will find that they are woefully inadequate to confront the challenge they are trying to meet. Then there are other proposals in this Queen's Speech that are downright bad for the people I represent. The immigration Bill will remove freedom of movement; the trade Bill will take Scottish consumers and businesses out of the single market. Both those things represent an existential threat to the future of my country.

But then I consider: "What does it really matter?", because this is entirely a charade. We know that this is a Government 40 MPs short of a majority. We know that none of this is going to pass, or come to pass, certainly in this Session of Parliament. It makes me wonder why we are engaged in this charade for six days, sitting here discussing proposals that will never happen. Of course, the truth is that the Government want to keep us occupied here, because the last thing they want to discuss is what they are talking to Brussels about at this point in time.

We also know that there is an attempt to abuse the parliamentary process and, indeed, to abuse the monarch of the country in trying to engage in what the Government hope will be a six-day party political broadcast. Well, good luck with that.

Today's debate is about the role of Britain in the world, and many people have considered Britain's standing in the world as part of that debate, so let me start with Brexit. I have heard a number of colleagues now say that there will be a problem if we do not, in the puerile language that we have now descended to, "get Brexit done" by 31 October; somehow, that will be a democratic outrage and it will compromise our ability to argue for democracy in other parts of the world.

Let us test that proposition. For it to be accurate, it would have to presume that there is an intention of this Parliament to overturn, negate or otherwise throw out the referendum of the British people in June 2016. I repeat for the umpteenth time that those who say that completely misunderstand the argument in this House. Nobody on the Scottish National party Benches and, as far as I have seen and witnessed in this House, nobody who is arguing about the dangers of Brexit has ever suggested that the referendum should be set aside and ignored by this Parliament. What has been argued is that the people who took that decision should be given the opportunity to reconsider and asked whether that is really what they want, knowing now what they did not know then—the terrible consequences of what that means.

We can look at this from the other end of the telescope, can we not? Imagine this: what does it do for our standing in the world to have a Government without a majority in Parliament or in the country pursuing a set of policies that, by their own admission, they know will impoverish the people they have sworn to protect and reduce the standing of the country in a global context? What does that do for our reputation, if a Government are prepared to do that without even consulting the very people in whose name they speak? Then we can look at the wider debate about Britain's standing in the world.

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Does he agree that those who have the courage of their convictions would be happy to put their views to a referendum? [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman talks about an election, and I look forward to there being about as many Scottish Conservatives left as there are in the Chamber at the moment.

Tommy Sheppard: I very much agree, but I will move on to the wider global context. What has not been discussed so far in this debate is the fact that Britain is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. I wonder how much longer that can continue,

[Tommy Sheppard]

because I would think that being a permanent member of the UN Security Council brings with it an obligation to provide some sort of global political leadership, yet that has been frighteningly absent from this country's foreign policy for a very long time.

In fact, for far too long this country has played second fiddle to the United States of America. That might have been good in the past, but US foreign policy is in a hopeless state of collapse and incoherence that leaves the United Kingdom looking like a hapless bystander on world events, unable to command any moral purpose or argument. There are so many examples, but let us look at the one happening this week.

The Turkish Government are engaging in ethnic cleansing in the northern part of another country, and we are simply observing the situation. In fact, this country was one of the last to cut and suspend its arms sales to the Turkish Government—arms that are currently being used to kill people in Kurdistan. That is a shameful situation.

I was one of the Members who visited the Rohingya refugee camps on the Myanmar-Bangladesh border last month. As I stood on those hillsides, I felt a sense of dread that the camps will still be there in 10, 20 or 30 years' time because, in order for them not to be there, we need international political action to stand up to the Government of Myanmar and to make them act. That is sadly absent, but it is the sort of political leadership this country ought to be giving to the world, rather than standing back and simply being an observer.

Tom Brake: May I add to the list of countries where we need active engagement from the UK Government? The Palestinian issue has also been completely neglected.

Tommy Sheppard: Indeed so, particularly when the whole middle east is about to descend into an even more frightening situation. It is an area of the world that this country was governing in living memory. If we do not have responsibility for doing something about it, who does?

I finish by thinking about what is happening 535 miles away in the city of Aberdeen, where the SNP conference is taking place. There have been a number of goads and jibes about our concern for independence, but the House should understand that when this party argues for Scotland to become a self-governing independent country, we do it not just because we believe we can make things better for the people who live there, nor just because we believe in the democratic argument that people living in Scotland, and no one else, should set their own priorities, but because we want to be able to determine our own relationships with other countries, particularly within Britain and Europe but also across the world. I assure colleagues in this House that when we get to vote on our independence, when we have an affirmative vote and when we begin to build a new country, it will be a country with open borders that wants to play its full role in the world and that wants to punch above its weight, as people from that country have done for generations.

6.8 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), I welcome one aspect of the Queen's Speech: the commitment that we will continue to play a

leading role in global affairs, defending our interests and promoting our values, and that we will position ourselves at the forefront of the most complex international security issues.

That is why the sins and omissions of this Queen's Speech are quite intriguing. There is one point on Earth where we have a particular legacy, where promises were made and broken by the world community and where the world community has now left the most terrible state of injustice: Kashmir. So I was surprised that there has been no mention in today's debate of our historical obligations to make good on the promises made in the 1940s. Much of this debate has rightly centred on Brexit issues, but our obligations, duties, moral responsibilities, history and commitments stretch much, much wider. We should therefore step up and do far more to raise our voice to try to bring a resolution to what is going on right now in Kashmir.

Some people say that this is a conflict between two nuclear powers—if only it was as simple as that. This is a conflict between not two nuclear powers, but three. China is the world's biggest consumer of Gulf oil and it is building a pipeline from China through Pakistan so that it can soon access oil through that overland route. The idea that China is going to permit someone to put its thumb on what is a new jugular vein is fanciful analysis.

So I would like to know from the Minister why the British Government are insisting that this remains a bilateral conflict. That is a fantasy, one enshrined in the treaty of Simla. In recent days, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, has said that that treaty is dead. This is no longer a bilateral issue, and by his unilateral action to suspend article 370 of the constitution—unilateral action prohibited by the treaty of Simla—President Modi has said in clear terms that this now requires a multilateral solution.

President Modi's decision to suspend article 370 has set the stage for an incredibly dangerous slide into violence, whereby risk is now multiplied by the decision to deploy thousands more troops into what is already one of the most militarised areas on earth. That danger, in turn, has been multiplied yet again by the decision to suspend all communications and put the people under curfew in what surely must be one of the largest open prisons on the planet.

The UK signed a treaty, the instrument of accession, on 26 October 1947, so we are a party to this, in a way. That treaty has now been breached, but we have heard nothing from the British Government about how they plan to remedy that. Crucially, Ministers have accepted that human rights are always a multilateral issue, so we must hear something from a Government who have set out before this Parliament a clear determination to put themselves "at the forefront" of solving "the most complex international security issues"—[*Official Report*, 14 October 2019; Vol. 666, c. 5.]

We must hear a plan from them to stand up for the interests of British citizens. I am not the only one on the Opposition Benches, or in this House, who is getting cases from people who have friends and family in the area and yet have no idea what is going on with them, because there has been a communications blackout. Crucially, we now need clear and urgent action from this Government in the United Nations to ensure that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is given free and unfettered access to the area, on

both Pakistan's side and the Indian side. I want to know from the Minister what he has done to pursue this agenda in the UN.

Surely, if we are to put ourselves at the forefront of solving international difficulties, the time has come for us to push for a multilateral solution to this decades-long injustice. There have been 295 international disputes between the second world war and the 1990s that involved a use of force by one state against another, with 171 of them entailing some kind of negotiation. Where the difficulties were the most intractable and where the breakthroughs most significant were when we accepted that there was only a multilateral path to peace. That is why we turned to Senator Mitchell to help broker the Good Friday agreement. It is why the world turned to President Carter to help broker the Camp David agreement. It is why we turned to Richard Holbrooke to help bring about the Ohio accords. The injustice in Kashmir has gone on for too long and if the Government are serious about what they say—we never know, perhaps they are—they will step up to their responsibility to bring this injustice to an end.

6.14 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): It was a pleasure to sit next to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) as he spoke so compellingly on an issue that will be of great concern to many of his constituents and, I suspect, to many Labour party members in the wider Birmingham area.

This has been a debate of depressing ironies, probably not for the first time in the history of the House of Commons. We are having a debate on Britain's place in the world as part of the debate on the Humble Address, when all the measures in the Queen's Speech and their potential impact on Britain's place in the world are dwarfed by the decision that we are about to take on the manner of Britain's exit from the European Union. Let me spend a moment on that, if I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, to implore my Opposition colleagues as we reach potentially the final hours of the process.

I reluctantly find myself in the position of seeking a confirmatory vote—a second referendum—despite there being, so far, I think, not a great change in the overall opinions of my constituents, who wanted to leave the European Union. I suspect a majority still do. I find myself in that position because every potential deal that came back, and certainly the deal that was agreed, represents a strategic downgrade of Britain's place in the world. In effect, the deal sought to anchor the UK to European institutions over which it would no longer have any sovereignty. My view has changed from the one I held in 2016, when I wanted the softest Brexit possible. Having seen the potential long-term damage of the halfway house that was presented to the British people and to Members of Parliament, I feel that the best way out of this situation is through a confirmatory vote.

I say to my colleagues on the Opposition Benches that although there are few things that could do greater long-term damage to Britain's strategic importance on the global stage than a failing halfway-house Brexit, I am afraid that one of them would be to make the Leader of the Opposition the Prime Minister. At a stroke, within a few short weeks, he could unravel the alliances with our key allies that have been literally decades—sometimes centuries—in the making.

We have a range of views on the Opposition Benches. The Liberal Democrats come closest to saying, "This idea is not a goer," but even they will not say, "Actually, this man is fundamentally unfit to hold the office of Prime Minister." The Scottish National party says, "Bring it on," because the worse the governance of the United Kingdom, the better for the SNP. Its Members think that would make the case for Scottish independence better, so they want to trash the United Kingdom.

In my former party we have a range of views—from the few, some of whom are on the Front Bench, who enthusiastically embrace the idea of the Leader of the Opposition becoming Prime Minister, to others who say sotto voce, "It's okay, it will be all right. It will not happen; we will find a way to stop it." Frankly, that is not good enough, given the scale of the damage it would do. I ask this of my friends who remain in the party: if they want people like me to continue to support a confirmatory vote on any deal, they have to do far more to show that the path to that vote does not run through making the Leader of the Opposition the Prime Minister and giving that regime the keys to Downing Street.

In the limited time I have left, I want to pick up on the really important theme that the SNP's defence spokesperson, the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), mentioned on the need for the UK to stand up and enhance its own security. I found myself agreeing with much of what he said, but he made the claim that, actually, many of the actions that the UK is seeking to take, and the positions that it is taking, would give succour to Putin and that despotic regime, which is determined to undermine the west. I have to say that, yes, that is true in Ukraine, but there is nothing, I think, that would give Putin more cheer than seeing us walk away from many of the alliances that are incredibly difficult for us to maintain if our friends act in ways that are inimical to our interests, but that would be catastrophic—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I call Thangam Debbonaire.

6.20 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). I have a great deal of time for him, as I do for the many contributions that have been made by Members from all parts of the House. In some ways, this highlights my frustration with the way we have to work in this place, with so many people making so many excellent points, but with such a short time in which to debate them. I do not know what we do about that, but I find myself holding back from intervening because I know that we are short of time, yet wanting to discuss things.

I want to talk today about our sense of values, which I heard admirably expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). I want to add to what he said and to develop that theme by suggesting that we have human rights explicitly named as a British value. I agree with the five values on the curriculum: democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for different faiths. Of course, I support them, but greater emphasis should be placed on human rights, environmentalism and equality.

[Thangam Debbonaire]

In fact, it looks as though the Government almost agree with me, because right at the end of the Queen's Speech, it says that the Government will prioritise

“tackling climate change and ensuring that all girls have access to twelve years of quality education.”

I suggest that that points towards the values of environmentalism and of equality. I ask the Ministers on the Treasury Bench to discuss this with their colleagues in the Department for Education to find out whether those priorities can be put on the school curriculum posters to go with the other five.

As a Labour MP, I know that our party is founded on the principle of equality. In government, we pioneered the world's first Climate Change Act in 2008 and the world's first legally binding carbon emissions reduction target, so, of course, I support prioritising climate change and I support prioritising gender equality.

I want to discuss a couple of points. I had hoped to hear something more explicit in the Queen's Speech, and in subsequent speeches, about how we can honour the value of human rights in relation to two global crises—one of forced migration, which is amounting to a record 70 million people this year, and the other of antimicrobial resistance, which is currently killing 700,000 people each year, and rising rapidly.

As has been said by others today, the war in Syria alone has resulted in 13 million Syrians being forced to flee, but, unfortunately, only 28 nations accept refugees on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees resettlement scheme—that is 28 nations out of the entire world. I ask the Ministers on the Treasury Bench to consider what further things they can do to encourage other states to take refugees into the resettlement scheme. I agree that, yes, we are one of the best in the world, and we should be proud of that, but I would like us to be the very best. One way in which we can do that is to expand our commitment to resettlement and put more emphasis on the prevention of refoulement—forced return—and on the prevention of conflict in the first place. I would like to see more resettlement, not less, and I would like to see more of it globally, because too many of the world's refugees are concentrated in countries that can least afford to look after them. In Lebanon, for example, one in four of the population is a refugee from Syria and most of them live in poverty, and in Turkey there are 3.6 million refugees. That is not good enough. We are not doing enough to share that responsibility.

Domestically, the immigration Bill must also include an end to indefinite detention of refugees. That should be part of our commitment to human rights and our sense of values and who we want to be seen as in the world. That was in an amendment that was tabled on the Immigration Bill and then the Immigration Bill fell and now we have to start all over again. Please, let us put it back on the agenda.

I would also like to see the end to any use of immigration detention for victims of torture, the return of the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill and an increase in resettlement generally.

The consequences of antimicrobial resistance are costly in financial and human terms. I have mentioned the number of deaths, but there will also be cumulative financial costs of up to \$100 trillion by 2050 if we do not take action successfully. I cannot even begin to

think how much that money could achieve if we were not going to lose it on the costs of antimicrobial resistance. I must pay tribute to my niece Aliyah Debbonaire, who is currently in the closing stages of her PhD, identifying novel antimicrobial drug candidates from microbes in extreme environments. I am very proud of her, but she is not the only one. Other experts on antimicrobial resistance are available, such as Lord O'Neill, who committed his wise words on antimicrobial resistance to the report published in 2016. I urge the Government to redouble their efforts. They published their vision earlier this year and it is a good one, but it could be so much better.

If we are truly to reflect our values in our place in the world, what better way than by following Lord O'Neill's recommendations to improve sanitation and global surveillance of drug resistance, and to promote the development of vaccines—a matter about which I feel particularly strongly?

I salute the work of DFID, which is a globally respected Government Department. It has a great deal to be proud of in our role in the world, but I would like us to be so proud of it that it is part of how we describe ourselves and part of how we encourage children to think of this country when they are talking about our values.

For most of us, our values are what get us up in the morning. They motivate us, we pass them on to our children and they are the reason that most of us are here. We often fall short, and that makes us human. But being part of humanity, we need to get up again, examine our consciences and try to do better. Last week in my local progressive synagogue I had the great honour of being part of the Yom Kippur service, and words about getting up, trying again and doing better were very much a part of it.

Our love for one another should take us beyond our differences and past our fears. It should help us get over our failures, and renew and redouble our determination to do better, to live up to our values, to celebrate those values and to show the world that that is who we really are.

6.26 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is almost two years and four months since the previous Queen's Speech so I ask: did my constituency of Stockton North finally get the new hospital, plans for which were scrapped in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition? No. Did we see some real commitment from the Government to invest in carbon capture and storage on Teesside and help us lead the world? No. But maybe we saw some investment and reassurance for our international chemical industries, which are nervous about what Brexit means for them and their employees. No, we did not. In the previous Session, Parliament was a failure—a failure to get a Brexit deal worthy of receiving Parliament's stamp of approval, a failure to provide the stability and assurance that our economy and our workers need and a failure to improve the lives of the most vulnerable right here in the 21st century United Kingdom. If we cannot get it right for our own people, what right have we got to tell—for that matter, what experience do we have to offer—the rest of the world?

We did get a continuation of the housing crisis. We also got more disabled people treated disgracefully by Government policy, at their wits' ends because they

have been found fit for work despite it being clear that they are not. We got more people turning to food banks because the money they receive simply is not enough to buy the basic food items they need to feed themselves and their children. This is about Government policy not recognising how people's lives work, which means that people suffer—children suffer—but we must look to the future and consider how we can change lives for the better. This House and the watching public saw a lot of nice things come out of the Queen's Speech, with plenty of positive words and an indication that austerity is over, but if there is one thing I will never do, it is believe in a Conservative Prime Minister when they claim to have the best interests of all parts of society in mind.

There is a significant life expectancy gap in my constituency. People living in the most affluent areas of Stockton North can live up to 18 years longer than those in poorer areas. If the Prime Minister was serious about investing in healthcare, he would announce the award of a new hospital for North Tees and Hartlepool. Instead, what we have heard is a blustered pledge of 40 new hospitals that turned out to be just six. Of the 21 trusts set to receive funding, not one is in the north-east.

Average male life expectancy in Stockton is 64. Owing to the health inequalities that face my constituents, their lives will be cut short. The average male in Stockton will not even reach state pension age. By contrast, the average life expectancy in the Prime Minister's area is 80—16 years more than in Stockton. People can draw their own conclusions why that is the case. It is the Government's responsibility to do something about it, but they are failing. Why on earth is the hospital in the Prime Minister's constituency getting countless millions of pounds invested in it when Stockton, where the need is much greater, is not getting anything at all? But my constituents will not be fooled. They know that it is the Tory cuts that have caused waiting lists to shoot up. They know it is Tory cuts that have plummeted the national health service into chaos.

Just as successive Conservative Governments have failed on health, they have failed on jobs, too. They have failed to back SSI at Redcar; they failed to back the Sirius Minerals mining project, which has the potential to create thousands of jobs for people across Teesside; and they fail daily to support our chemical and other energy-intensive industries, which have suffered higher carbon and energy costs than anywhere else in Europe. We have seen the plethora of news releases and plenty of ministerial visits, but nothing of consequence has actually resulted from them—nothing to protect industry or jobs in areas like mine. The north-east has the highest unemployment rate in the UK at 5%. It has gone up by 19,000 in the past year. On Teesside, it is 7.2%, and in my own constituency just above 7%—up again today. Of those unemployed—in one constituency—630 are 18 to 24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training.

The Government can do better by ending this crisis in investment to ensure that our country's place in the world is not put deeper in jeopardy. Successive Conservative Governments have created a climate of uncertainty, a clear lack of direction and a meaningless strategy that is just leaving investors nervous. The additional carbon costs that I mentioned are adding to those nerves. The Government can act now by giving carbon capture and storage in the north-east the verbal and financial support

it needs but is simply not forthcoming. INEOS, which I raised in this House prior to Prorogation, is an essential part of the supply chain in the Teesside chemical industry. I will be meeting the Secretary of State about that. There is still no chance of that company investing locally, yet it can invest billions in the middle east. All industry can see is the doom and uncertainty of what Brexit will bring and a tariff regime that will cripple their businesses. Perhaps the Prime Minister will prove me wrong and will now take investment in Teesside seriously, not as a means of its being politically beneficial but because it is the right and imperative thing to do. If we are serious about reaching net zero emissions by 2050, carbon capture is not a choice—it is a necessity.

But I have no confidence that this Government will act in the best interests of my constituents, nor of business in Stockton North, Teesside, or the north-east in general. I will not stop fighting for the Teesside area. We do need our new hospital, but we really need a serious industrial strategy for the north-east and a Government programme to benefit everyone. Sadly, this Queen's Speech does not offer it.

6.32 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to be the final Back-Bench speaker in this debate and to follow the wonderful words of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), who has probably made the most powerful case for remaining in the European Union with the best deal—the one that we currently have. Certainly, if we do get to the point of having a second referendum, I will be banging the drum to remain in the European Union, not just for the residents of Hornsey and Wood Green but for every region in the UK, where he is quite right to say that there is no proper industrial strategy. In a sense, if we stick within the European Union, that is an industrial strategy. It needs improvement, but at least it is the bare bones of one that we can build on.

I would like briefly to bring out a few themes of the debate. Many Members have raised the right to go out on the streets and to have freedom of assembly. Some have mentioned the protests in Hong Kong, which we would all like to be much more peaceful, but even on our own streets, we see the protests of Extinction Rebellion because we know that climate change should be much higher up the foreign policy agenda.

Other themes include the global challenge of poverty and access to healthcare and education for all, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) talked about so clearly, and the UK's role in energetically working towards a solution to the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. That does not seem to be breaking through at the moment, due to Brexit inertia; we cannot hear that voice.

My constituent Aras Amiri is currently serving a 10-year sentence in Evin prison outside Tehran. Where is the strong voice on these crucial issues and the cases of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Aras Amiri and others who are tragically in prison on trumped-up false charges?

Another theme is the protection of freedom of speech. Mr Speaker, I am not sure whether you have had a chance to read the wonderful book "In Extremis: The Life and Death of the War Correspondent Marie Colvin", but I am sure that every Member of this House would

[Catherine West]

like to put on record their thanks to the journalists who go out to the most dangerous parts of the globe and report back on our behalf.

In the dying moments of the debate, I want to underline what, for me, is the most tragic situation currently in the globe: what is happening to the Kurdish people in Rojava in the north of Syria. The Kurdish people have been our friends for a very long time. As an MP representing a constituency in the north of London, I know that the Kurdish community could not be more welcoming. I have enjoyed beautiful breakfasts when door-knocking, with wonderful hospitality—“Come in! Come and have a boiled egg, some lovely salad, a sausage and some tea.” I feel that we have let them down. We have not done enough; whether that is due to the Brexit inertia, I am not sure.

I had a slight hope last week during the urgent question on that issue, when I felt we were in that diplomatic space, which is what we were promised by the Foreign Office, but that night I switched on the television at 10 o'clock and saw the bombs falling. It is an absolute tragedy and a dereliction of duty on the part of the US to land us in it in this way. To not even tell us, but rather announce foreign policy on Twitter, is appalling. I therefore welcome the Government's announcement today that they will suspend arms sales to Turkey. I would be grateful to have a bit more detail on the sequencing, but I am pleased to be able to say positive things about the Government's policy, while decrying some of the absences. We need to have a much louder voice on this. We need to speak endlessly about it and try to get Mr Trump to understand that he simply cannot pull the rug from under the Kurdish community in Rojava.

In particular, we must talk about the experiences that so many women in that region have had. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) talked about the Rohingya women. We, as women MPs, must speak up about the rape and sexual assault that women in conflict zones experience. I want to hear our Government say that it is not on for soldiers to come over from Turkey and exploit women in that way. It is appalling.

We know that tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians have fled the region, and if Turkey is successful in its operation, more than 3 million Arab refugees will be resettled in the area. Although those refugees completely deserve the ability to return to Syria safely, it must not be at the cost of fundamentally changing the demographic make-up of the region and effectively cleansing the area of Kurdish communities who already call the region home. The excellent writer Philippe Sands talks in his compelling book “East West Street” about the difference between genocide and acts of violence against humanity. It is a very interesting intellectual debate. I fear that what will happen in Rojava is genocide, and I want our Government to redouble their efforts to do something about that, because they must not allow the US to get away with just walking away. I hope that the Minister will outline his vision on that.

Sadly, the Brexit debate has led to our voice being softer on the international stage, but I hope that we will be sensible on Brexit, so that we can get back to that central part of our narrative about being compassionate and caring about human rights and peace and being at the forefront of those important debates.

6.39 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): It has been a pleasure to listen to this debate, even though it has felt at times like bald men in a dark room fighting over a comb that is not even there. As we know, this is a Queen's Speech devoid of any meaningful content, not least in the areas of Brexit and foreign affairs that we have been debating today. That is presumably why the Foreign Secretary has not even bothered to wind up tonight's debate. All in all, frankly, it has been the biggest waste of Her Majesty's time and the biggest indignity that she has been put through since the fallout over “It's a Royal Knockout”.

Nevertheless, this evening does give me two opportunities: first, to summarise some of the excellent points that have been made by my colleagues during this debate; and secondly, to ask the Minister of State, who has been asked to stand in tonight, whether he can answer some questions on the Foreign Secretary's behalf. More than 80 days have passed since the new Foreign Secretary was put in place, and he may like Phileas Fogg have been around the world in that time, but neither his conference speech in Manchester nor this Queen's Speech give any indication that he is across his brief or even that he has his focus on the right priorities. Indeed, as the lawyer for the Harry Dunn family observed on television this week after a meeting with the Foreign Secretary—excuse yet another profanity, Mr Speaker, but I am quoting—they got the impression that “he didn't know his arse from his elbow”.

Let me see whether the Minister of State can do rather better this evening, and my first question to him relates to the Harry Dunn case. Can he tell us the exact date when diplomatic immunity was withdrawn from Anne Sacoolas, if it was ever granted at all, and if it was never granted, why she was not held in the UK for questioning?

I will go on to further questions for the Minister later, but for now may I mention some of the excellent contributions made in this debate by some of our colleagues in the House? We heard the shadow Brexit Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), and the former shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), demolishing with forensic skill the Prime Minister's proposed new deal and explaining why it would be even worse for our country in its impact on jobs and the economy than the one already and repeatedly rejected by this House.

We heard the Chair of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), speak with his usual eloquence and authority about the rules-based international order and how it applies to conflicts in Syria and Yemen. Those sentiments were passionately echoed by the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) and my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire). They called for clarity and courage from this Government, and they are absolutely right.

We heard an impressive speech from the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) on our relationships with America and China, and with the EU and the Commonwealth. However, I would say to him—perhaps

he can read it in *Hansard*—that, given his unfounded concerns about the Opposition’s attitude to the Commonwealth, I was very glad to spend two weeks of the summer recess visiting my counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, just as he mentioned William Hague did in 2011.

Catherine West: May I just say that I heard from my fellow Antipodeans about my right hon. Friend’s wonderful presence in Australia, and about how much she was welcomed in the commonwealth—the old commonwealth?

Emily Thornberry: I thank my hon. Friend very much.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) talked with great force about the crisis between two of our Commonwealth cousins, India and Pakistan, with the constitutional and human rights of the Kashmiri people being trampled in the middle of that. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) about how we have let down the Kurds, and I believe she is absolutely right.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham). It was not a speech about foreign policy, but it was one of the most passionate speeches that I have heard for a very long time, with his pure, naked anger at the fact that men in his constituency have a life expectancy of 64, whereas men in the Prime Minister’s constituency have a life expectancy of 80. No wonder he is so angry, and his eloquence said it all.

We heard so many excellent contributions—there were many more that I have not had time to mention—but it is left to the Minister of State to close this debate, and I have a number of specific questions for him. They are based on the Foreign Secretary’s recent speech in Manchester, which at least attempted to address some foreign policy issues, as this Queen’s Speech has so brazenly failed to do.

First, may I ask the Minister why, in the course of a speech of 1,300 words, the Foreign Secretary did not once mention these countries or their leaders? He did not mention Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Cameroon, Brazil or Brunei, and he did not even mention Kashmir. These are not peripheral issues, but ones that should be at the top of the Foreign Secretary’s brief, yet he found time to make jokes about Luxembourg and to tell us how much Donald Trump loves Britain. This is of course the kind of love that expresses itself by ignoring everything that our Government say to him—from climate change, trade wars and the Iranian nuclear deal to the unforgivable betrayal of the Kurds in northern Syria. But even though the Foreign Secretary did not discuss any of those countries, I am delighted to hear that he said in Manchester that he would “relish, not shrink” from our global duty to bring the perpetrators of injustice and war crimes to account. So let us put that commitment to the test.

I hoped that in this Queen’s Speech we would hear a commitment to work through the United Nations to end the airstrikes and the atrocities being committed by Turkey and its jihadist death squads in the Kurdish regimes in northern Syria. I was hoping that we would hear a commitment to table a new resolution before the Security Council of the United Nations demanding an immediate ceasefire by all parties in Yemen, in every part of the country. I was hoping that we would hear a

commitment to recognise the state of Palestine while there is still a state left to recognise. I was hoping that we would hear a commitment to hold a judicial inquiry into the historical allegations of the UK’s involvement in torture and rendition, and the operation of our country’s secret courts. I was hoping that we would hear a commitment to table a resolution for agreement at the United Nations referring Myanmar to the International Criminal Court for investigation of its crimes against the Rohingya, because of course we hold the pen on that issue as well.

I was hoping that we would hear commitments to correct the historic injustices over the two Amritsar massacres, the discriminatory demob payments from world war two given to non-white soldiers in the colonial regiments, the Chagos islanders’ right of return, and our nuclear test veterans. Those issues would all feature in a Labour Queen’s Speech—the Kurds, Yemen and Palestine, torture, rendition, the Rohingya, Amritsar, demob pay, the Chagos islanders and the debt owed to our nuclear test veterans—but under this Government, those issues go utterly ignored.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Sir Robert Syms: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Emily Thornberry: I will just take one intervention.

Sir Robert Syms: I sat for 13 years under a Labour Government who did nothing for nuclear test veterans.

Mr Kevan Jones: Yes we did.

Sir Robert Syms: No you didn’t.

Emily Thornberry: We announced at party conference what we would do. The challenge for the current Government is to meet that commitment. We challenge the Government to do the right thing on the test veterans. It is all very well for the Conservatives after 10 years to say, “Oh you didn’t do it during 13 years.” They are in government now. This injustice exists now. Do something about it right now.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Emily Thornberry: I am not taking any more interventions. I do not have enough time.

So can I ask the Minister of State: does that really sound like relishing our global duty to tackle injustice, or does it sound more like shrinking away?

On Sunday it will be a full year since the previous Foreign Secretary stood at the Dispatch Box talking about accountability for the death of Jamal Khashoggi. He said:

“There remains an urgent need to establish...who authorised the dispatch of 15 officials from Saudi Arabia to Turkey...if the appalling stories we are reading turn out to be true...there will be consequences and of course it will have an impact on the relationship with Saudi Arabia.”—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 79-82.]

A full 12 months ago, despite the fact that the CIA and the UN have reached their own conclusions on who ordered the murder, and despite the fact that the previous Foreign Secretary talked about the urgency of the investigation, we have not seen a single conclusion from

[Emily Thornberry]

this Tory Government, let alone any of the consequences that they promised us would follow. So again, can I ask the Minister of State: if the last Foreign Secretary's words at the Dispatch Box meant anything, and if the current Foreign Secretary's words in Manchester meant anything, will the Government finally do their duty, indeed relish doing their duty, to give justice to the family and friends of Jamal Khashoggi, or will they keep shrinking away?

Mr Speaker, when basic crimes against humanity have been committed in Yemen, or in the embassy in Istanbul, and when crimes against humanity are being committed in northern Syria today, we need a Government who will lead the world in tackling that injustice, and we need Foreign Office Ministers who will walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

6.49 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Christopher Pincher): It is a great pleasure to stand at the Dispatch Box after three years in which I laboured in the monastery of the Whips Office—a place that I know is close to your heart, Mr Speaker—where my Trappist vows meant I could not speak and could not act. Having been released back into the Chamber to open my mouth, it is a very great pleasure to address the House and to wind up this debate on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who has been at the National Security Council today.

We have had a very good and wide-ranging debate, with excellent contributions from across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (Sir George Hollingbery), who knows a thing or two about trade, spoke knowledgeably about trade deals. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) spoke movingly about the importance of freedom of religion. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) had some rather good ideas about the Foreign Office, which I think involve umbrellas. I shall be happy to talk to him more about that. And, of course, there was an excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms), a former colleague in the Whips Office.

I listened carefully to what the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary, had to say. We found out a great deal about what she would do in any Queen's Speech that she might be party to. We found out that, apparently, she is not going to do very much about Brexit, because there was not a single mention of it in her speech. She asked about a number of countries that the Foreign Secretary had not addressed in the House. There are a lot of opportunities for her to table urgent questions; Mr Speaker is always very keen to hear them. It is interesting that she took such a great interest in what the Foreign Secretary had to say in Manchester. It is a city that perhaps she might want to visit once or twice. It would be nice if perhaps she came to our conference, given that she spent so much time talking about it. We would be very pleased to see her there—on the fringe of course, but not in the main hall.

May I begin, Mr Speaker, by thanking you and saying that it is a great honour to close this debate and reaffirm the Government's vision for a self-confident,

ambitious, outward-looking global Britain beyond Brexit? Under this Government, the United Kingdom will leave the European Union on 31 October. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Brexit Secretary, who was in Luxembourg today and who has been working incredibly hard to negotiate the good deal we want to achieve. It is the responsibility of every Member of this House who is serious about keeping their promise to the voters to respect the 2016 referendum to get behind this effort for the good of the whole country.

The leader of the Labour party will not keep his promise to respect the referendum. He wants to take the country back to another divisive referendum. It was unfortunate to hear what the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) had to say. They said that they do not want no deal. They also said that they do not want this deal. What they really want is no deal at all: they want to take us back and cancel Brexit. They want to overturn the result of the referendum. They want to overturn the instruction given to us by the British people. Why do they think that that will inspire confidence in our democracy? Why do they think that if the previous referendum was divisive, the next referendum is somehow going to bind us all together?

Stephen Gethins: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Let us talk about his own record in Government. This afternoon, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the UK Government had stopped going to justice and home affairs committee meetings in the EU, which have been discussing migration and refugee flows from Syria and Turkey. Can he tell me what possible foreign policy or security benefits there are from not turning up?

Christopher Pincher: We went to the Foreign Affairs Council yesterday; we were party to the discussions there and the outcome of those deliberations.

The Gracious Speech sets out the legislation that we need both to give effect to Brexit and to grasp the opportunities of it. That legislation will ensure a smooth and orderly departure and a better deal for our farmers and fishing industry, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) expressed. It will take back control of our immigration policy, with a points-based migration system, and allow us to become an energetic champion of global free trade for United Kingdom businesses and consumers. Our vision for a global Britain is about more than Brexit, because if only the Opposition will let this country go, we will get beyond Brexit.

The Government will maintain and strengthen our historical trade ties, boosting our competitiveness by expanding trade with growth markets of the future. We want a strong trading relationship with our existing partners in Europe and North America. Thanks to the tireless work of my right hon. Friend the International Trade Secretary, we have made good progress in preparing the ground for future free trade agreements after Brexit. In the words of the US Secretary of State, the US is poised

“on the doorstep, pen in hand, ready to sign”

a deal. We are not at the back of the queue; we are at the front of the line. That is good news for our businesses that want to export, and it is good news for consumers on both sides of the Atlantic who want cheaper food and services with wider choice. That is where the opportunities of the future will be found. As a global champion of liberal free trade, this Government are ready to grasp those opportunities. We are the internationalists; we are not the little Europeans who sit opposite.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Will the Minister give way?

Christopher Pincher: No, I will not, because I have only three and a half more minutes.

The leader of the Labour party may run to defend President Putin, like some north London primped and plucked poodle, but Government Members will work with our allies to stand up for and protect the people of this country. We will work with all our international partners to shine the spotlight on Iran's violation of international law, from the attack on the Aramco oil facilities in Saudi Arabia to its cruel and unlawful detention of United Kingdom nationals. We will work with our European and American friends to secure Iran's compliance with its obligations not to develop nuclear weapons, and we will engage with all our partners to prevent the bloodshed in north-eastern Syria.

One of the strongest speeches I heard today was made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). I do not have time to answer all his points, but if his speech tonight was the last that he makes in this Chamber, he will be a sad loss at the general election when he retires. I am afraid that it was not possible at the United Nations to come to an agreement to produce a resolution, but we have released a statement with our European partners, and we will ask for further work to be done at the UN tomorrow.

We will also be a constructive voice on Hong Kong, supporting its people's right to peaceful protest and encouraging political dialogue on all sides to give effect to the one country, two systems model that China has consistently advocated since 1984. My right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary has made clear our robust stance on Venezuela, in contrast to the leader of the Labour party, who celebrates the achievements of that despotic regime and does so as people starve.

We will be a force for good and a champion of causes that know no borders. On the international stage, we will show the leadership of the next generation, as it expects us to, by hosting the United Nations climate summit—COP 26—in Glasgow next year, in partnership with Italy. We will bring to bear both our world-class innovation and our determination to leave our environment in a better state for our children and theirs, in the United Kingdom and across the world. We will continue to lead global action to help to provide 12 years of quality education for all girls by 2030 and leave no girl behind. We are proud of the new media freedom coalition we have set up with Canada. Some 26 countries are already signed up, having committed to protecting media freedoms, speaking out against abuses and standing up for journalists who are detained, bullied and brutalised around the world.

That is the mission of this Government: to deliver Brexit, faithful to the promises made to the British people; to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead for

a truly global Britain; and to reinforce the United Kingdom's role as a force for good in the world. I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

7 pm

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Mike Freer.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

ELECTION OF SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS (NOTICE OF ELECTION)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 122C(1), the Speaker may announce a date for an election of chairs of select committees before 24 October 2019 in respect of which the requirement of notice is not met.—(Mike Freer.)

Mr Speaker: I can now inform the House of the arrangements for the election of the Chairs of the Treasury Committee and the Backbench Business Committee. The Treasury Committee Chair is vacant following the resignation of Nicky Morgan. The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is elected, of course, at the start of each Session.

Colleagues, nominations for both posts should be submitted by 5 pm on Monday 21 October. Only Members of the Conservative party may be candidates for the Treasury Committee election, for reasons that are well familiar to the House. For those observing our proceedings, I explain that this is because Select Committee Chairs are apportioned to different parties in accordance with party strength in the House. In this Parliament, the Treasury Select Committee Chair is in the hands of the Conservative party. Only Members whose party is not represented in Her Majesty's Government may be candidates for the Backbench Business Committee election. The ballot will take place on Wednesday 23 October from 10 am to 1.30 pm. Briefing notes with more details about the election will be made available to Members and published online.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance. Just over a week ago, one of my constituents, who wishes not to have his name mentioned, after applying for a passport for a son who lived abroad, received a knock-back letter from the Home Office.

In the envelope with the letter was also documentation from two other citizens applying for passports. They are totally unrelated to my constituent. We have written to and emailed the Home Office and the Home Secretary's office, and followed up on that communication, asking for an urgent response, but we have not yet had an acknowledgment, let alone a reply. All we have asked for is urgent instruction as to where to send the documents so that they can be received safely and the passport applications can be dealt with quickly and efficiently. These documents concern applications not made by people who live in my constituency, but relate to people from totally different parts of the country.

[*Ian Mearns*]

Although my constituent wishes to remain anonymous, I would also like to pay tribute to his public service attitude. Having been knocked back by the Home Office, he could have done anything he wanted with those documents, because nobody knew he had them, but he brought them to my office. I have tried to bring the fact that I now retain them on his behalf to the attention of the Home Secretary and the Home Office, but I have not yet received a response. These applications need to be dealt with urgently.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise it. My response is that, as will be demonstrably obvious to everybody, this is an administrative error, and something of a mess has flowed from that error. Human error is a fact of life, and we do not dwell on that, but it is very important that the matter is re-routed as expeditiously as possible, as those two other individuals with pressing cases would want. The public service that the hon. Gentleman has performed is to bring the matter to the attention of the House and hopefully very soon to that of the relevant Department, the Home Office, and the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), the Home Secretary. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get a response from the Home Office tomorrow, if not tonight.

This is my counsel to the hon. Gentleman, in so far as he requires it. If his action tonight does not elicit a speedy response, I suggest that he raise the matter at business questions on Thursday. More widely, I suggest that he follow my general advice, which is “persist, persist, repeat, repeat, repeat.” In short, I say to the hon. Gentleman, “Make a general nuisance of yourself, sir, until the Government sit up and take notice, in the interests of those two individuals.” I underline what the hon. Gentleman said by way of tribute to his public service-oriented constituent.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder what the procedure ought to be, and whether you would be minded to take an urgent question on this matter, given my own history and experience in the Department for Work and Pensions when I was an adviser. At that time, we found that there was a systemic problem. What had happened was a one-off, but it was a systemic technological admin error that had caused not simply one letter but many thousands to go missing. Clearly the question of whether this was an isolated incident must remain open until a Minister from the Home Office comes to the House to report otherwise.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. No one can accuse him of failing to take his opportunities when they present themselves. I cannot give him an immediate assurance that an urgent question application which has not yet been made, and which therefore manifestly I have not seen, will be acceded to by the Chair. However, the hon. Gentleman was present and correct when the Minister for Europe and the Americas, who has just beetled out of the Chamber—perfectly properly, I hasten to add—referred en passant to my enthusiasm for urgent questions. Whether the Minister did so with any great enthusiasm himself, I leave observers to decide for themselves. If the Minister does not approve

of my granting of urgent questions, he is perfectly welcome to his opinion, which will not cause me any loss of sleep. But it is certainly the case that I very much favour the urgent question as an instrument of scrutiny, and indeed, very often, of Back-Bench opportunity. So if the hon. Gentleman submits an urgent question—or if the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, does so—it will be carefully considered. He is clearly not planning to do so at the moment, but we are where we are.

Ian Mearns: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. At the moment, I am not the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Mr Speaker: Oh yes, of course. There is a vacancy. Far be it for me to accuse the hon. Gentleman of being a procedural pedant, because the Chair is in favour of procedural pedantry. He is not; but he was a distinguished, indeed illustrious, Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, who regularly had confetti showered upon him by Members in all parts of the House.

If the matter comes to me, I will consider it. Let us leave it at that.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for not having given you notice of this point of order, but it relates to the answer that the Leader of the House gave earlier in his business statement about the possibility of a Saturday sitting. He was asked, “When are we going to know?” and he said that it was contingent on what happened at the European Council on Thursday and Friday.

Am I right in thinking that, unless the House agrees to a business motion before we rise—presumably on Thursday—saying that there will be a Saturday sitting, the only way in which a Saturday sitting can then happen is as a result of a request to you, as Speaker for the House, to sit on that day? If that is the case, and if that request is not made until, say, late on Friday evening, how exactly are Members meant to know that the House has been recalled, unless they are notified by their Whips or read about it in the newspapers? You may not want to comment on this, Mr Speaker, but would it not be preferable if the House were to be informed in advance that there was to be a Saturday sitting, rather than the recall procedure being used—if my understanding is correct?

Mr Speaker: In broad terms I agree with the thrust of what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. There are two routes to this House meeting on Saturday. One is a motion before the House and approved by the House, which specifies that the House shall sit on Saturday, and it would be expected to indicate the period of the intended sitting. The alternative route would be the method of recall under the relevant Standing Order, whereby a Minister of the Crown asks the Speaker to facilitate—to agree to—the said recall. My understanding as of now, and I speak with some knowledge of contacts had, is that the Government are more inclined to the former route than the latter. It is, however, also the case that the Government’s thinking is potentially contingent upon, and therefore liable to be influenced by, the development of events over the next 48 or even 72 hours. The former route, in terms of the convenience both of Members and of the staff of this House, would be preferable, and I am very sensitive both to the needs of

Members and to those of staff, and I undertake to the right hon. Gentleman and to colleagues more widely to remain alert and use my best endeavours to try to ensure that the House is in no way disadvantaged. I hope that that is helpful to colleagues.

PETITIONS

Frozen Expat Pensions

7.11 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Many of my constituents have relatives in Canada or Australia, for example, and they continually raise the issue of frozen pensions, about which I fully agree with them.

The petition states:

The petition of Residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

Declares that the UK state pension is the worst in the developed world; further that the 500,000 UK pensioners living outside the EU will not see their pension increase in line with inflation over the next 3 years; and further that this creates a two-tier pension system based upon where a pensioner now lives.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Work and Pensions to increase the UK state pension for all expat pensioners by either 2.5%, average wage growth or by the consumer price index, whichever is higher.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002528]

TV Licences for the over 75s

7.12 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I rise to present a petition collected by two passionate, dedicated citizens of Barrow and Furness concerned at the impact

of removing free TV licences from a number of pensioners in my constituency, particularly those who are just above the pension credit level or perhaps one of the up to 1,915 households in the constituency who are entitled to pension credit but do not claim. This could cause severe hardship.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Barrow and Furness,

Declares that television licences should be free to all those aged over 75; further that free TV licences matter because for many older people television is their main source of news, entertainment and information, and provides a link to the outside world; further that for older people living on very limited budgets, having to pay the full cost of a TV licence would put an even bigger strain on their finances; and further that the plan to make it free to those households who are claiming pension credit will not benefit those most in need—it is well known that pension credit, for a variety of reasons, is massively under-claimed (in this constituency alone up to 1,915 predicted households entitled to, but not claiming, pension credit, to the tune of an estimated £4,649,324); further a related local petition on this matter has received 564 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take back responsibility for funding this important concession for all those aged over 75.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002531]

Mr Speaker: It is excellent to see the Home Secretary in her place. Whether she was in place at the point at which the point of order was being raised, I do not know, but she is being briefed about it. People observing our proceedings will be pleased to see that no sooner is a matter of concern aired in the Chamber than the relevant Minister—in this case, the Home Secretary—beetles into the Chamber to be briefed all about it. This is very encouraging. Thank you.

Unregulated Accommodation: 16 to 17-year-olds

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

7.14 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): “This cannot be right.” Those were the words of Dr Jackie Sebire, the assistant chief constable of Bedfordshire police, after her officers had spent four to five days trying to find a 16-year-old boy who had gone missing from his unregulated accommodation in Bedfordshire. Her officers had spent an enormous amount of time and effort to return the child to a provision that was inadequate, in which no local Bedfordshire authority would place one of their own children and for which there was no regulatory oversight.

The standards in the accommodation in which the 16-year-old was placed were so poor that this young man regularly went missing, and shortly afterwards he became involved in organised crime and went on to recruit other young people into organised crime. So we have, in effect a multiplier of misfortune as a result. The Local Government Association and the police are concerned that children are being drawn into organised crime, including county lines, from unregulated homes. About 2,000 16 and 17-year-olds are placed outside their home local authorities in this type of unregulated provision. That is a doubling over the last five years. Around 5,000 children in total are in this type of unregulated provision—a 70% increase in the last decade.

Let me provide some further illustrations of why regulatory oversight is needed urgently. We know from the brilliant investigation undertaken by Sally Chesworth and her team at “Newsnight” that a 16-year-old girl was brought to a room in one of these homes late at night. It was freezing cold and had no bed sheets and no curtains, even though it was a ground-floor room looking straight out on to a road. We know that staff regularly enter rooms without knocking. We know that a 17-year-old girl was hit in the face by a 6-foot male staff member who would not let her speak to the police about the incident. We know that staff members are being abusive. One child was told, “It wouldn’t matter if anyone kills you. No one cares about kids in care.” Members of opposing gangs were sent by one London borough to the same home in Bedfordshire, where one duly stabbed the other.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate to the House. I sought his permission beforehand to make a comment. The Social Care Inspection blog on the gov.uk website states that unregulated care homes

“should be used as a stepping stone to independence, and only ever when it’s in a child’s best interests”.

Given what we now know from the BBC investigation, which concluded that young people were at risk of organised abuse, is it not time for the Government to at least examine the ways in which the regulatory regime governing such accommodation is structured?

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I will go on to call for exactly what he has just highlighted to the House.

Many of these homes also have adults up to the age of 25 in them, and we know that drug taking is prevalent in many of them. We know that a young man on bail for knifepoint robbery was placed in a home with 16-year-old girls. We know that two girls were placed alongside a male sex offender, and that one 17-year-old boy was murdered by another resident. The home had not told either sending local authority about an earlier fight between the two boys.

The impact on police forces of the number of missing person incidents from unregulated homes is significant. Police officer availability is an extremely precious resource to local communities. Quite rightly, a missing child is always a high priority for any police force. If there is a significant increase in the episodes of missing children in a police force area, that means that other vulnerable children and adults in the population area of that police force are left much more unprotected than they should be.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important issue to the House for consideration. Does he agree that one of the major concerns is how 16 and 17-year-olds in care regularly go missing? Does he also agree that local authorities and the Department for Education should reform how data on the number of young children is collected, and that the figures should be made available and published on a quarterly basis?

Andrew Selous: More data is always good. I will come on to suggestions about what local authorities need to do.

In 2018, the top six locations for episodes of missing persons accounted for one quarter of the overall number of missing episodes in Bedfordshire. Of those 1,049 episodes, 779—three-quarters of the total—came from these unregulated settings. The Centre for the Study of Missing Persons at the University of Portsmouth estimates the average cost of investigating a missing person at £2,400. That is a financial cost to Bedfordshire police of around £1.9 million caused by these unregulated homes. It means that the officers involved cannot respond to other serious incidents. What makes the situation worse is that most of those children are being placed in this substandard provision in Bedfordshire by local authorities outside the county.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Has my hon. Friend come across Home for Good, a fostering and adoption charity, and its five-star campaign, which is looking not for five-star accommodation for young people, but for five-star care? If he has not come across it, perhaps he will look into it and encourage the Minister to do likewise?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; like him, I am a huge admirer of Dr Krish Kandiah, and I will say a little bit about that charity and what it can do later in my remarks.

In three of the unregulated homes that I visited in September with the police, only three out of the 17 children there came from Bedfordshire. All the other children were from other local authorities. They had all gone missing on multiple occasions; one child, indeed, had gone missing 41 times. Local authorities sending 16 and 17-year-olds to Bedfordshire include Stockton-on-Tees,

Peterborough, Sandwell, Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Swindon, Windsor and Maidenhead, Manchester, Birmingham, Essex, Nottinghamshire, Devon, Enfield, Barnet, Hillingdon, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Haringey, Ealing, Merton and Croydon. Some of those have lamentable due diligence in their placing decisions.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I congratulate my hon. Friend, who is generous in taking interventions. It is not just a case of the quality of the accommodation that many of these vulnerable young people are put into, or indeed the services available to them, but the locations they are placed in. Is he aware that some years ago in the Department for Education we produced "heat maps", which showed areas where children should just not be placed? Children were being placed in homes on the same street as sex offender hostels, for example. There is a duty on directors of children's services to ensure that the areas in which these children are being placed are appropriate and safe.

Andrew Selous: I completely agree; that is another reason for more regulatory oversight, which I will call for. Perhaps this issue needs to come up in planning policy as well.

Central Bedfordshire sends very few of its own children out of the area. As a Bedfordshire Member of Parliament, I am simply not prepared to accept this wholly unacceptable diversion of police resources caused by other local authorities acting irresponsibly and using provision that no local authority in Bedfordshire would put its own children in.

It is not as if this provision is cheap, either. A typical cost per child in these unregulated homes is around £800 per week, which is £42,000 per child per year. Some unregulated provision will cost considerably more than that, and it is completely unacceptable that taxpayers are paying such enormous amounts of money to private businesses, some of which do an appalling job and are more interested in making money than in looking after vulnerable children.

Given that several members of staff that I spoke to when I visited some of these homes told me that they needed no training whatsoever to undertake this work, I suspect that rates of pay are low and significant profits are being generated for the directors of these companies. Who is overseeing value for money for taxpayers, who are having to fork out these enormous amounts per child for such poor-quality provision, which in turn is placing a huge burden on other parts of the public sector such as the police?

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an important speech on an important subject. In my own constituency, we have a high number of homes—often regulated ones, which is good—but because we are in the wilds the children who tend to be sent there are the runners, who have run away from other homes. That means that when they go missing, as they often do because they have a history of it, they can be missing for a very long time and take not just police but mountain rescue out looking for them. Does he agree that it does not help that the care homes themselves are still charging fees when children are missing, so they have no incentive at all to go and look for them, and it is left to the police?

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Why should the duty of care fall only on the police and not on the sending local authority or on the home itself? She makes a pertinent point.

It is also completely unacceptable how little information is shared between sending and receiving local authorities, and between sending and receiving police forces. All local authorities have a statutory duty to check the standard of provision in which they are placing their vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds.

Thirty-four locations in Bedfordshire are providing unregulated supported living for 16 and 17-year-olds. Central Bedfordshire Council has a quality assurance manager, Sharon Deacon, who will not place the council's own children in many of those homes, and her role has been commended by the Howard League for Penal Reform.

It is extraordinary that other local authorities continue to use much of this provision when Central Bedfordshire Council will not place its own children in these unregulated homes. Those sending local authorities, in many cases, do not even bother to check whether the provision is suitable, which is vital. Sharon Deacon has conferred with her counterparts at Bedford Borough Council and Luton Borough Council, and sending authorities do not always notify the hosting local authority in Bedfordshire about the children they are sending to the county, as required by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, so the current law is not being adhered to and there are no checks or enforcement actions in respect of those breaches.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way, and he raises some important points. For some time I have been pushing for a regulator of supported housing for people with addictions and the homeless. I have a high-profile property in my constituency where, again, the local council does not send people but outside local authorities do.

I have secured a meeting with the Minister soon, and I am working with my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George). I would appreciate it if we all worked together on this issue.

Andrew Selous: I look forward to working with Members of good will on both sides of the House to get this right. This is not a party political issue, and we just have to get it right for children, for police forces and, frankly, for the taxpayer.

Sending police forces do not notify Bedfordshire police of the criminal records of the children concerned. One young arsonist was sent to my constituency without any prior notification to Bedfordshire police, which is simply unacceptable. There should be a full exchange of information between both local authorities and police forces on the quality of provision and the children concerned.

The Select Committee on Education published a report on 16-plus care options in July 2014, and it made the following recommendation:

"There are measures to ensure the quality and safety of settings for children and young people right across provisions: childminders, foster carers, residential children's homes, secure training centres, schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges are all inspected. Yet accommodation that falls within the category of

[Andrew Selous]

'other arrangements' is not subject to individual regulatory oversight. What makes this distinction all the more illogical is that the 22% of looked after 16 and 17 year olds who live in such accommodation are among the most vulnerable young people in society. It is unacceptable for these young people, still legally defined as 'children' and in the care of their local authority, to be housed in unregulated settings.

We recommend that the DfE consult on a framework of individual regulatory oversight for all accommodation provision that falls within the category 'other arrangements' to ensure suitability while allowing for continuing diversity of provision."

The Government of the time did not accept that recommendation, but I am hopeful that the current Government will because members of the Select Committee who wrote that report include the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation and the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart).

Five and a half years later, progress on this issue has been too slow. The Department for Education met Ofsted and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers on 13 December 2018, and I met the previous Children's Minister, accompanied by the assistant chief constable of Bedfordshire police and officers from Central Bedfordshire Council, on 27 February 2019. I had a follow-up meeting with the Minister, accompanied again by the assistant chief constable, on 24 June, and I know that Sir Alan Wood hosted a roundtable to look at this issue on 11 September. It is now time to act, as we have all the evidence we need that local authorities are unwilling or unable to provide the necessary level of scrutiny of these unregulated homes.

Many providers of unregulated accommodation have been allowed to get away with unacceptably low standards, which have horrific consequences for some of the country's most vulnerable children, because of a lack of scrutiny. Given that the current attempts to ensure standards have failed, it is now time for Ofsted to provide proper regulatory oversight. We also urgently need a fit and proper person test, so that the directors of the businesses that run these homes can be held to account personally. We need a duty on sending local authorities and police forces to notify receiving local authorities and police forces.

Of course, we need to work on providing more good-quality provision, especially for those with complex needs. The Local Government Association reports that the number of looked-after children reached a new high of 75,420 in 2017-18. That is an average of 88 children entering local authority care every day. A rising proportion are over 16—the figure was 23% in 2018, which was 17,330 children. The LGA also points out that only 28% of accommodation is local-authority-run, with 5% being run by the voluntary sector and two thirds provided by the private sector. This means that as the scale of need grows, it becomes even more urgent to rapidly improve the quality and quantity of provision.

We should mandate the implementation of the Philomena protocol brought in by Durham police to provide police forces with the very best information to help them quickly locate missing children. I am also grateful to Home for Good for its suggestions as to how we could encourage more fostering for these children, as exemplified by its own work, and to the Shared Lives

movement for the example it provides. Of course, as always in these difficult matters of social policy, we need to think about what more we can do to slow down the demand and to provide greater support for families so that they can continue to be able to look after challenging children.

In that regard, I wish to single out the work of Wigan Council, which no longer places any of its children outside its own area. I am very grateful as well to the all-party group on runaway and missing children and adults for its report last month on children who go missing from out-of-area placements. The Children's Society provided very valuable support for that inquiry, and I am grateful to it for its help with my preparation for this debate.

As a nation we need to do far more to support and strengthen families to help them keep children safely at home, and I am pleased that this Government have now appointed the Chief Secretary to the Treasury as the family champion across government. It is now high time to take decisive action to improve the standard of accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds, as the Select Committee called for more than five years ago.

7.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Michelle Donelan): Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on securing this important debate. I know that he is working particularly hard to highlight the concerns of his constituents and his local police force that some children and young people placed in independent and semi-independent provision are being put at risk.

I share his concerns and fears about the current state of affairs. As a recently appointed Minister, this is one of my key priorities, and I want to reassure my hon. Friend that this Government are clear: it is completely unacceptable for a child to be in placed in a setting that does not meet their needs and keep them safe, and I am considering the checks and inspections needed.

Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): First, I wish to join the Minister in saying what a brilliant speech we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). He talked about a wide range of local authorities putting these youngsters into such unregulated and unsatisfactory dwellings. Is the Minister able to tell us why we think that is happening? He came up with some brilliant solutions, but, as someone new to this debate, I want to know why this is going on, as it is completely unacceptable.

Michelle Donelan: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. This is a complex problem and we have a rising number of children in care, which we need to get to grips with. Those children are predominantly at an older age, which is resulting in such outcomes. So there are strains on the supply of accommodation. I will get on to the rest of what he raised within my speech, if he will just be patient with me.

As I said, a rising number of children are in care, and most of them live in registered children's homes or foster care. However, the age of those children is rising; the demand on the system is increasing; and it is a somewhat unprecedented situation. We are not only taking steps to help local areas to manage the situation,

but supporting local authorities to improve the work that they do with families to safely reduce the number of children who enter care in the first place—something I am particularly passionate about. Last week, I announced the investment of £84 million over five years to support 18 local authorities to do exactly that, as part of the strengthening families programme. We have already provided funding through our £200 million children's social care innovation programme, and £5 million of that funding is specifically targeted at residential care.

For the most vulnerable children who need secure provision, we are working to increase the number of beds in secure homes through our £40 million capital grants programme. We are funding local authorities, with £110 million to date to implement “staying put” arrangements, under which care leavers remain with their foster carers while they are under 21. We are working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to help local authorities to develop more effective accommodation pathways for care leavers.

Currently, a small but growing number of children are placed in settings that are not registered with Ofsted. Some of these settings are not registered because they provide only accommodation and not care, although they may provide some support. They offer semi-independent living for older children and care leavers who are ready to live with some independence, and they can act as a stepping stone to adult life. Let me be clear, though: we set a high bar for the level of care that must be provided by registered children's homes, and children who need this care should not be placed anywhere else.

I have visited some excellent examples of semi-independent living, even in my own constituency. There is a place for this type of provision when local authorities have taken the required steps to ensure that it is of high quality and is used appropriately.

Ruth George: Will the Minister give way?

Michelle Donelan: Time is really tight and I have a lot of ground to cover. If I have time in a moment, I will give way.

Not all the provision of the type I have described is being used correctly, and the quality across the board is simply not good enough. I am determined to tackle that. Just as worrying is the placement of children in settings that are offering care but have not been registered with Ofsted. Such settings are illegal, and Ofsted has the power to prosecute such providers. I invite my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire to meet me to flag up any homes that he believes fit the criteria, and I invite any other Member to do the same, because they must be stopped. Permanent settings that deliver both accommodation and care must be registered with and inspected by Ofsted.

Another policy area on which the Department is focused is the age of those in unregulated provision, as referred to by my hon. Friend. I have received reports from Ofsted, local authorities and police forces about some younger children living in unregulated, semi-independent provision. Let me be clear again that I do not want children under the age of 16 to be living in an environment without care. Today, I call on all local authorities to put their houses in order on this issue and to ensure that further action is taken. My hon. Friend will know that if a child is placed in a semi-independent,

unregulated setting, the local authority is required by law to ensure that the provision is suitable. My predecessor wrote to all directors of children's services earlier this year to remind them of this duty. As I stressed earlier, such providers should be registered, and those that choose not to be are acting illegally.

Ofsted is taking a lead and has, over the past few months, already ramped up its focus. Ofsted has conducted more than 150 investigations in the past year alone. I will continue to apply pressure in this policy area. Alongside that, Ofsted has tightened up the requirements, under its inspection regime, for local authorities to share how they monitor children in unregulated provision, by increasing the data that they request from local authorities and issuing further advice to inspectors. However, recent research commissioned by the Department suggests that, despite our guidelines, some local authorities are genuinely unclear about what is permissible in relation to the use of unregulated and unregistered provision. I want to ensure that there is no confusion at all, so I am working with my Department to ensure that there is new statutory guidance so that everyone involved in providing care to looked-after children and care leavers is absolutely clear about what is required of them.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) highlighted the number of children who go missing in unregulated provision. Not only is that a threat to a young person's safety, it can also be a serious flag to other things that are going on in their lives. Some local areas are already developing effective responses, but we need to ensure that all local areas recognise the threats to vulnerable children and young people and respond appropriately.

On 9 May, the Department for Education announced a £2 million tackling child exploitation support programme to provide dedicated advice and practical support. This programme will help areas to develop effective multi-agency responses to deal with things that will affect vulnerable children, including county lines.

I want to take this opportunity again to thank my hon. Friend for South West Bedfordshire for securing this debate to highlight this crucial issue here today. It is clear to me that the current system leaves far too much room for variability and inconsistency across the whole sector. Although we have tried to address that, I recognise that there is still so much more to do and so much more that can be done. Alongside the Education Secretary, I have been meeting members of Ofsted and others in the sector to determine where further action should be taken and the broader landscape of checks and inspections on the types of provision that we want to see. I know that local authorities do not take decisions lightly. These complex issues should not be underestimated, but children must be placed in settings that are suitable for their needs.

I thank all Members who have contributed to this debate. I am aware that this is not a new issue and it is right that, as a newly appointed Minister, it is at the top of my agenda. Both the Secretary of State and I are clear that the current system is completely untenable. We must get this right, and I will ensure that we do.

Question put and agreed to.

7.41 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 15 October 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Committee on Climate Change: Government Responses to Annual Progress Reports

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrea Leadsom): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I wish to inform the House of the laying of the Government responses to the Committee on Climate Change 2019 reports on reducing UK emissions and preparing for climate change.

2019 has been a pivotal year in the fight against climate change. As the scientific evidence of the dangers of global warming continues to mount, and as people of all ages call for urgent action, the message to governments around the world is clear: act, and act now, to protect the future of our planet.

The UK has long been a leader in clean growth, cutting emissions while growing the economy. We were the first to set a long-term emission reduction target in law, under the Climate Change Act (2008), and since 1990 we have reduced emissions by over 40% while growing the economy by more than two thirds. On 27 June, the Government adopted legislation to set a new net zero greenhouse gas emissions target for the UK, to be delivered by 2050. This made the UK the first major economy to set a net zero target in law, ending the UK's contribution to global warming in three decades.

That target is an immense challenge for the whole of society—but not only is net zero achievable, it can and will be the growth story of the 21st century. We have a thriving low carbon economy, with turnover in the low carbon sector growing more quickly than GDP in 2017, supporting almost 400,000 jobs across the country.

But our success to date is not a reason to delay action, it provides the argument for going further and faster. By taking action to cut emissions we can protect our planet while putting UK businesses at the forefront of the zero carbon revolution, especially as we prepare to embrace the Presidency of COP26 next year.

As well as supporting our emissions reduction efforts, our world-leading Climate Change Act continues to provide a robust framework for strengthening our preparedness to climate change, through our national adaptation programme (NAP).

Today we are also introducing the landmark Environment Bill—the first in over 20 years—which will tackle the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. The Bill will improve air quality so that our children live longer, restore and recover environmental biodiversity, and move us towards a more circular economy, which will help to ensure Britain can be cleaner and greener for future generations.

Exiting the EU does not change the UK's commitment to domestic and international efforts to tackle climate change. The new independent office for environmental

protection, which this Bill will establish, will work closely with the Committee on Climate Change to ensure climate and environmental legislation is respected once the UK leaves the EU.

In July this year, The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published their annual Progress Report: “Reducing UK Emissions - 2019 Progress Report to Parliament”; and their biennial “Progress in preparing for climate change”. Today we are publishing Government's responses to both of these reports, in fulfilment of our requirements under the Climate Change Act.

Government response to “Reducing UK Emissions -2019 Progress Report to Parliament”

The Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) annual progress report, published in July, recognised the progress that has been made, but also set out some tough messages about the need for further action across the economy. This government have heard that message, from the Committee, from businesses, and from people across the whole country.

The Government response to the CCC's report sets out the action that is being taken across all sectors of the economy, working through the strong frameworks we have established in the clean growth strategy and the industrial strategy. It also reflects the suite of recent announcements we have made in support of our net zero target. In our response published today, we set out further actions that we will take to deliver net zero, and meet our carbon budgets, including:

Ambitious proposals to improve the energy performance of non-domestic buildings, potentially saving businesses around £1 billion per year in energy costs by 2030;

Development of a new, holistic transport decarbonisation plan to step up the pace of progress towards a cleaner, more sustainable and innovative transport network; and

A proposal to establishing new governance arrangements to drive forward cross-government efforts to deliver the net zero target, potentially including a new cabinet sub-committee on climate change.

This builds on what we have delivered over the last year. Since legislating for net zero emissions in the summer, we have announced around £2 billion to support decarbonisation in a range of sectors, including investment in hydrogen and low carbon technology in industry, electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, and projects to accelerate rollout of carbon capture and storage technology.

We recognise the importance of reducing emissions from industry and we have just set out our detailed proposals for our £315 million industrial energy transformation fund which will support industry to invest in energy efficiency and deep decarbonisation technologies.

The latest contracts for difference auction saw contracts awarded to renewable energy projects that will create enough generating capacity to power around 7 million homes, with the costs of new offshore wind projects falling by a remarkable two thirds between the 2015 and 2019 auctions. This demonstrates the scope for advances in technology to deliver unprecedented cost reduction.

And we will set out further detail on how the UK will make progress towards our net zero target in the national infrastructure strategy this autumn.

In addition to our progress at home, the UK remains at the forefront of international action on climate change. In September, we were formally nominated by our international partners to host the vital COP26 climate negotiations in 2020. We intend to use this role to catalyse ambitious global action to cut emissions further, and harness growing momentum to take us closer to delivering the goals of the Paris Agreement.

At the recent UN climate action summit, the Government announced that the UK will double its international climate finance to £11.6 billion in the period 2021 to 2025. In assisting developing countries, we will draw on the breadth and depth of the UK's expertise to support the transformational and systemic change needed to deliver a net zero world resilient to the risks from climate change.

Government response to "Progress in preparing for climate change"

In July 2019, the CCC published their third progress report on adaptation, their first on the second national adaptation programme (NAP) detailing action from 2018 to 2023. The progress report contains twelve recommendations for Government spanning four of the key themes of the second NAP, published in 2018; the natural environment; infrastructure; people and the built environment, and business, as well as 33 sectoral progress scores, such as water supply, rail, roads, agricultural productivity, amongst others. The CCC highlights areas of good planning and progress as well as areas where they identify the need for further policy development and evidence to support and monitor the success of adaptation.

The Government response mirrors the CCC's progress report. The headline message is that we have made progress on adaptation and broadly accept the recommendations made by the CCC. We will build on this progress to ensure the country is well prepared to face the challenges a changing climate brings. The CCC's recommendations will be addressed in our current and future policies and programmes such as through the 25 year environment plan, the Agriculture Bill and Environment Bill, amongst other policy areas across Departments. In particular the Environment Bill, introduced today, will include ambitious legislative measures to take action to address the biggest environmental priorities of our age, many of which are linked directly to climate change.

At the same time we are demonstrating leadership at a global level on the agenda, driving action as co-lead of the resilience and adaptation theme of this year's UN climate action summit, where a UK co-led call for action has been endorsed by 112 countries and counting.

We remain grateful to the CCC for their scrutiny, analysis and expert advice, which will be more vital than ever as we set the UK on a firm path to net zero. The challenges of reducing our emissions, and preparing for the changes that climate change will bring, are immense but, the rewards of action will be greater still. This Government have listened to the science and the clear message from across society and we are redoubling our efforts to drive down emissions while seizing the economic opportunities at hand, as we lead the world towards a cleaner, greener, net zero future.

[HCWS3]

EDUCATION

School Funding Allocations

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I am today informing you of the details of an announcement made by the Department for Education on Friday 11 October on the further details of school revenue funding for 2020-21. At the spending round we announced a total additional investment of £14 billion in schools over the next three years, the biggest funding boost for a decade. This includes £2.6 billion for 2020-21, £4.8 billion for 2021-22, and £7.1 billion for 2022-23 compared to 2019-20. On top of this we are providing £1.5 billion each year to fund additional pensions costs for teachers, bringing the total schools budget to £52.2 billion in 2022-23.

This funding will give every school more money for every child, with the biggest boost going to schools that need it most. It means all secondary schools will receive a minimum of £5,000 per pupil next year while all primary schools will get a minimum of £3,750 next year and £4,000 per pupil from 2021-22.

On Friday we published the details of provisional allocations for local authorities in 2020-21 through three of the four blocks of the dedicated schools grant: the schools block, the high needs block, and the central school services block. As usual, allocations through the early years block will be published later in the year.

The per pupil units of funding for local authorities that we have published will be used to set final allocations when updated pupil numbers are available later in the autumn. As in previous years, there will be further data updates in relation to the high needs block.

We have also published notional school level allocations for 5 to 16 funding, so that schools can understand the amount they attract under the national funding formula. Details of these arrangements have been published on gov.uk.

The figures reflect the features of the national funding formula that we announced on 30 August 2019.

For the schools national funding formula, these include:

- increasing the total funding in the schools block by 5%;
- increasing the formula funding floor so that all schools will attract at least a 1.84% per pupil gain against their 2019-20 national funding formula baselines. This is in line with the forecast GDP deflator, to protect per pupil allocations for all schools in real terms;
- removing the gains cap so that underfunded schools attract the full gains they are due under the formula;
- increasing the core factors in the national funding formula by 4%; and
- updating the underpinning data used in the calculation of the national funding formula, where more recent data is available.

For the high needs national funding formula, these include:

- increasing the total funding in the high needs block by 12%;
- increasing the funding floor to 8% per head of population, compared to 2019-20 allocations, to ensure that all areas see substantial gains;
- setting a limit on the gains under the formula of 17% per head of population; and
- updating underpinning data, as for the schools block.

We have also published local authority allocations for the central school services block in 2020-21. We have protected the total funding allocated for the ongoing responsibilities that local authorities have a statutory duty to deliver for all pupils in maintained schools and academies. These allocations will continue to be calculated for all authorities using a per pupil formula, the structure of which is unchanged. Local authorities will continue to be protected so that the maximum per pupil reduction in this funding is 2.5% compared to their 2019-20 allocation; and the maximum per pupil gain will be set at 1.94%.

As we have stated previously, from 2020-21 we will start to reduce the other element of central school services funding, that some local authorities receive for historical commitments made prior to 2013-14. This is in line with our reforms to move to a fairer funding system. In 2020-21, for those authorities that receive it, historical commitments funding will be reduced by 20%, with a protection so that no authority loses an amount equivalent to more than 0.5% of its 2019-20 schools block allocation. We will continue to unwind this funding in future years, and will provide further detail in due course.

The detail of the changes above, and some further technical changes to the national funding formula, are outlined in the accompanying policy document. To note, these changes relate to the 2020-21 NFF. We have not confirmed the details of the NFF for future years.

As we have previously confirmed, local authorities will continue to set a local formula to determine individual primary and secondary school budgets in 2020-21. However, we have set out the Government intention to move to a “hard” national funding formula for schools as soon as possible, where every school’s budget will be set on the basis of a single, national formula. We recognise that this will represent a significant change and we will work closely with local authorities, schools and others to make this transition as smoothly as possible. As a first step towards hardening the formula, from 2020-21 we will make it compulsory for local authorities to use the national minimum per pupil funding levels in their own funding formulae, and are currently consulting on our proposals for introducing this change.

Last week’s announcements underline how the significant funding boost we have announced will benefit every area in the country and support our continued move towards a fairer funding system, helping every child to achieve their potential, no matter what their background or where they happen to live. This comes as research in the teacher workload survey shows that teachers’ working hours have fallen by five hours per week over the past three years. The findings, taken from a representative survey of over 7,000 teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders, also show that actual teaching hours remain broadly stable. Our continuing investment in education, coupled with a bold reform agenda and the work of Ofsted will bolster the ongoing rise in school standards.

[HCWS1]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Bill

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Theresa Villiers): Today, I am introducing the Environment Bill into the House of Commons, which

will play a crucial role in delivering on the Government’s goal that this will be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

The case for tackling biodiversity loss and climate change is clear. The accelerating impact of climate change in this country, and around the world, is of profound public concern, as is the damage to nature with species loss, habitat erosion and the disappearance of cherished wildlife.

The Environment Bill, building on the vision set out in the 25 year environment plan, will help to manage the impact of human activity on the environment, create a more sustainable economy, and enhance well-being and quality of life.

A key aim of the Bill is to engage and empower citizens, local government and businesses to deliver environmental outcomes and create a positive legacy for future generations. It will also support recent legislation on reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050 by reducing waste, improving air and water quality, and restoring habitats to allow plants and wildlife to thrive.

The Bill will transform our environmental governance by creating a new, world-leading system tailored to a UK context once we leave the EU. It will introduce new statutory cycle of monitoring, planning and reporting on the environment, coupled with a framework to set long-term legally binding targets, on biodiversity, air quality, waste and resource efficiency, and water. This will deliver significant environmental improvement and ensure that the Government can be held to account for their actions.

This new framework will ensure that environmental principles are embedded in Government decision making and policy development.

A new public body—the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)—will act as an independent watchdog. The OEP will provide scrutiny and advice, and enforce the delivery of environmental law “including on climate” by public authorities where necessary.

Together, these measures form a robust framework which will maintain and enhance our environmental standards as we leave the EU. They will enable the UK to take a global lead on environmental concerns such as nature recovery and the protection of biodiversity.

The Environment Bill takes action to address some of the biggest environmental priorities of our age: air quality, nature recovery, waste and resource efficiency, and water resource management. For example, mandatory biodiversity net gain principles will ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity in conjunction with local nature recovery strategies which will help restore wildlife rich habitats to enable ecosystems to recover and thrive.

The Bill strengthens the ability for local authorities to tackle air quality issues. It will also require Government to set a legally-binding target for the pollutant with the most significant impact on human health, fine particulate matter. The Bill improves water company planning for future water supply and wastewater and drainage networks, enabling more resilient solutions to drought and flooding in a changing climate.

Extended producer responsibility and powers to set resource efficiency standards will drive a shift in the market towards products that can be more easily recycled,

re-used and repaired. This, and other measures in the Bill, will play a significant part in addressing public concern about plastics waste and pollution.

This Environment Bill is a landmark commitment to protecting and improving the environment for future generations. It grasps opportunities created from leaving the European Union and I hope that it will deliver a step change in environmental protection and recovery.

[HCWS8]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): I will attend the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 15 October 2019 to represent the UK. The UK Government have decided that from 1 September until exit day, UK Ministers and officials will only attend EU meetings where the UK has a significant national interest in the outcome of the discussions.

The provisional agenda includes:

Preparation of the European Council on 17-18 October 2019 and European Council follow-up

The Council will discuss preparations for the October European Council, for which the agenda includes: the multiannual financial framework; the next institutional cycle; climate change; and other items such as specific foreign policy issues. The European Council (Art 50) will meet in EU27 format to discuss the state of play regarding Brexit. Ministers will also take stock of the implementation of previous European Council conclusions. *Enlargement and the stabilisation and association process—Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia*

Enlargement is the process whereby European countries are able to join the European Union. The October General Affairs Council will consider whether or not to open EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The Commission's 2018 and 2019 enlargement progress reports recommended opening negotiations with both.

Any other business: Transparency seminar (Brussels, 24 September 2019)

The Finnish presidency will update the Council on a transparency seminar that it hosted on 24 September. The UK did not attend the seminar due to the current policy on attending EU meetings. This is largely an information-only item. Finland is keen to enhance the openness and transparency of the legislation process. It is seeking to facilitate discussions between member states and the institutions during its presidency, with the aim of reaching agreement on a number of measures to make the Council's work more transparent.

[HCWS2]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Special Representative on UK Victims of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA Terrorism: Indemnity

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 4 October formally commenced the appointment of Mr William Shawcross

as his Special Representative on UK victims of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA terrorism. This appointment reflects HMG's strong commitment to support all UK victims of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism. The Special Representative has been asked to focus, in the first instance, on investigating the feasibility of calculating a precise number of people affected and the compensation due to them from the Libyan Government. This is an important preliminary step. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) believes that, provided the Special Representative acts honestly, reasonably, in good faith and without negligence in the performance of his obligations under the terms and conditions agreed with him, he should be indemnified against any liability arising from this role. The FCO is therefore notifying Parliament of its intention to undertake this contingent liability. Further details are set out in a Departmental Minute laid today.

[HCWS5]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Domestic Abuse Support

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): My Department has published the Government response to the consultation on the future delivery of support for victims and their children in accommodation-based domestic abuse services.

Through the consultation we heard from victims and survivors, service providers, local authorities and other public agencies, as well as other professionals who support victims including children every day. All responses to the consultation were carefully considered—I am grateful to everyone who took the time to respond, providing vital insight and evidence.

The majority of respondents agreed with the proposals as set out. The Government will therefore introduce a statutory duty on local authorities, placing clearer accountability on local areas to ensure the needs of survivors and victims within safe accommodation are met in a consistent way across England. By introducing this statutory duty, we want to ensure all victims of domestic abuse are able to access support within safe accommodation that meets their specific individual needs. All victims, no matter their background, should feel safe and supported as they recover from this terrible crime.

Under this new duty tier 1 authorities (county councils, metropolitan, and unitary authorities, and the Greater London Authority) in England will be required to convene a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to support them in undertaking local needs assessments and developing local strategies. Tier 1 authorities will also be required to effectively commission services based on a robust needs assessment, and report back to the Government demonstrating how they have met the needs identified. The duty will also require tier 2 authorities in two-tier areas (district, city, and borough councils) to co-operate with the lead tier 1 authority.

To support local authorities, my Department will develop statutory guidance which will set out the Government's expectations of local authorities in delivering this duty. We will also establish a ministerial-led national

steering group to monitor and evaluate delivery of support within safe accommodation—working closely with the newly appointed Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

The full response can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-safe-accommodation>.

The Domestic Abuse Bill demonstrates the Government's commitment to supporting all victims of domestic abuse. The Government will now introduce this new statutory duty as an amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill at the earliest opportunity, to enable proper parliamentary scrutiny.

My officials will continue to work closely with local authorities, national organisations, and specialist domestic abuse service providers to ensure the proposals are effectively delivered on the ground.

I am also pleased to announce ahead of this new duty coming into force in 2021, that we are confirming today a further domestic abuse accommodation services funding round for 2020-21. Councils will be invited to bid for a share of £15 million—a 20% increase on 2019-20—to ensure essential support services are able to run for those that need them.

A copy of the Government response to the consultation will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS10]

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Legislative Programme

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): Following yesterday's state opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills which were announced yesterday:

- Agriculture Bill
- Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill
- Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill
- Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill
- Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill
- Domestic Abuse Bill
- Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill
- Environment Bill
- European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill
- Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill
- Financial Services Bill
- Fisheries Bill
- Foreign National Offenders Bill
- Health Service Safety Investigations Bill
- High Speed Rail 2 (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill
- Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Bill
- Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill
- Medicines and Medical Devices Bill
- Pension Schemes Bill
- Police Protections Bill
- Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Bill
- Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill

Serious Violence Bill

Sentencing Bill

Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill

Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill

Trade Bill

Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill

The programme will also include Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions.

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the gov.uk website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/queens-speech-2019-background-briefing-notes>.

[HCWS4]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Legislative Programme

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Julian Smith): The legislative programme for the Second Session was outlined by Her Majesty on Monday 14 October. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Northern Ireland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or Finance Bills.

The legislative programme will deliver important reform to domestic issues and deliver benefits across the whole of the United Kingdom. The programme includes a series of ambitious reforms and brings forward measures to support citizens across all the nations of the United Kingdom. The Government believe strongly in upholding the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom—our Union is at its strongest when all four nations work together.

The Government have taken the necessary steps to ensure the UK leaves the EU with certainty, continuity and control by working to deliver an unprecedented programme of legislation to date, preparing for all scenarios. The second Session legislative programme will build on this by seizing the opportunities EU exit brings.

The Government's top priority in Northern Ireland is the restoration of the devolved institutions at the earliest possible opportunity. The Government will continue to work with all of the parties in Northern Ireland, and the Irish Government, as part of the ongoing talks process to support the return of the Executive.

In the absence of an Executive the Government remain steadfastly committed to ensuring good governance in Northern Ireland. We will continue to take action to protect the continued delivery of vital public services where necessary.

The following Bills contained in the programme are likely to apply to Northern Ireland (either in full or in part):

- Agriculture Bill
- Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill
- Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill
- Domestic Abuse Bill
- Environment Bill

European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill
 Extradition (Provisional Arrests) Bill
 Financial Services Bill
 Fisheries Bill
 Foreign National Offenders Bill
 Health Service Safety Investigations Bill
 Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Bill
 Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill
 Medicines and Medical Devices Bill
 Pension Schemes Bill
 Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill
 Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill
 Trade Bill
 Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill

In the absence of a devolved Assembly and Executive we will continue to work constructively with Northern Ireland Departments to deliver legislation which will apply to Northern Ireland.

[HCWS9]

SCOTLAND

Legislative Programme

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):

The legislative programme for the second Session was outlined by Her Majesty on Monday 14 October. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or Finance Bills.

The legislative programme will deliver important reform to domestic issues and deliver benefits across the whole of the United Kingdom. The programme includes a series of ambitious reforms and brings forward measures to support citizens across all the nations of the United Kingdom. The Government believe strongly in upholding the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom—our Union is at its strongest when all four nations work together.

The Government's domestic programme will, for example, include the Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill which will ensure consumers can be confident in the knowledge that their tips are going to the staff as they intended across the UK. The Environment Bill will also put environmental ambition and accountability at the very heart of Government.

The Government have taken the necessary steps to ensure the UK leaves the EU with certainty, continuity and control by working to deliver an unprecedented programme of legislation to date, preparing for all scenarios. The second Session legislative programme will build on this by seizing the opportunities EU exit brings. This includes the Fisheries Bill which will provide the powers to build a sustainable and profitable fishing industry, which is in the best interests of the whole of the UK and future generations.

The Government expect that the return of powers from the EU will lead to a significant increase in the decision-making powers for the devolved Administrations.

It will mean that decisions and powers sit in the right place and closer to people than ever before.

The following bills would apply to Scotland (either in full or in part).

Agriculture Bill
 Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill
 Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill
 Domestic Abuse Bill
 Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill
 Environment Bill
 European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill
 Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill
 Financial Services Bill
 Fisheries Bill
 Foreign National Offenders Bill
 Health Service Safety Investigations Bill
 High Speed Rail 2 (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill
 Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill
 Medicines and Medical Devices Bill
 Pension Schemes Bill
 Police Protections Bill
 Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill
 Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill
 Trade Bill
 Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill

In line with the Sewel convention, the Government will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament where appropriate.

[HCWS7]

WALES

Legislative Programme

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The legislative programme for the Second Session was outlined by Her Majesty on Monday 14 October. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Wales. It does not include draft bills, Law Commission bills or Finance Bills.

The legislative programme will deliver important reform to domestic issues and deliver benefits across the whole of the United Kingdom. The programme includes a series of ambitious reforms and brings forward measures to support citizens across all the nations of the United Kingdom. The Government believe strongly in upholding the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom—our union is at its strongest when all four nations work together.

The Government have taken the necessary steps to ensure the UK leaves the EU with certainty, continuity and control by working to deliver an unprecedented programme of legislation to date, preparing for all scenarios. The second session legislative programme will build on this by seizing the opportunities EU exit brings.

The Government expect that the return of powers from the EU will lead to a significant increase in the decision-making powers for the Devolved Administrations. It will mean that decisions and powers sit in the right place and closer to people than ever before

The following Bills will apply to Wales (either in full or in part):

Agriculture Bill
Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill
Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill
Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill
Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill
Domestic Abuse Bill
Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill
Environment Bill
European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill
Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill
Financial Services Bill
Fisheries Bill
Foreign National Offenders Bill
Health Service Safety Investigations Bill
High Speed Rail 2 (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill

Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill
Medicines and Medical Devices Bill
Pension Schemes Bill
Police Protections Bill
Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Bill
Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill
Sentencing Bill
Serious Violence Bill
Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill
Trade Bill
Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill

The Government will continue to work constructively with the Welsh Government to secure the legislative consent of the National Assembly for Wales where appropriate.

[HCWS6]

Petition

Tuesday 15 October 2019

OBSERVATIONS

EDUCATION

GCSEs & dyslexia

The petition of Residents of Sevenoaks constituency,

Declares concern over the current standards in marking GCSE English exams taken by students with dyslexia; further declares that many children with dyslexia are exceptionally gifted at English but struggle to pass their English GCSE due to how many marks are dedicated to spelling and punctuation; further that this is discrimination and can negatively affect children's futures, mental health and access to further education opportunities; and further notes a local petition started by Mrs Sonia Ash on this matter that has received over 10,200 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review the current marking system in regard to students with dyslexia to make the system fairer and to remove marks for spelling, handwriting and punctuation on English GCSE exams for children with dyslexia so they are not discriminated against.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sir Michael Fallon, *Official Report*, 4 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 318.]

[P002513]

Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):

During the GCSE reform process the Government consulted extensively with schools, colleges and universities and employers on both the principles for reform and the detail of the content of individual subjects. The effect of the reforms on pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was carefully considered.

The Government have reformed GCSEs because employers and educators reported that too many school leavers lacked crucial skills. Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar are necessary for effective written communication. The Government want all pupils to have the opportunity to acquire these skills to a good standard and that is why, from primary school onwards, we have placed a greater focus on the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In making the decision to reform GCSEs, we took full account of the potential impacts on those with SEN and disabilities, including students with dyslexia and published an Equalities Impact Assessment. We will keep this position under review and are considering undertaking research on those with learning difficulties since the policy was introduced, and what that can tell us about the impact on those groups. Where we can draw out relevant data, we will consider that in relation to the policy.

In the department's published subject content for English language GCSE, it is specified that: candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling

and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the total marks for each specification as a whole.) There are no marks for handwriting in GCSE English.

Exam boards have developed their own guidelines on how they attribute these marks. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are not free standing elements that are considered separately. They all impact on sentence structure, clarity and effect. A student will receive a mark that is proportionate to the overall skill they have demonstrated across the different elements.

Students do not lose marks, but are rewarded (given marks) where they have demonstrated relevant knowledge, understanding and/or skills in response to a particular assessment.

The number of marks a student is given for aspects of the qualification that include spelling, punctuation and grammar will not be set out on the GCSE certificate. GCSE results are issued as grades that are awarded based on a student's overall performance in that qualification. This is because GCSEs are compensatory qualifications that allow for a student's strengths and weaknesses in a particular subject to balance out.

We appreciate that some disabilities can make it harder for pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in assessments. Examination boards have a duty, under the Equality Act 2010, to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities who, because of their disability, would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage when demonstrating their skills, knowledge and understanding. These adjustments are made to remove or reduce disadvantages that such students face compared with students who are not disabled.

Ofqual, the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, does not prescribe what reasonable adjustments exam boards can, or should, provide but does require all exam boards to have clear, published arrangements for making reasonable adjustments. Their arrangements must include details about who qualifies for a reasonable adjustment and what reasonable adjustment will be made. Section 20(3) of the Equality Act 2010 requires exam boards to take such steps as it is reasonable to take to avoid disadvantage.

While exam boards must minimise the extent to which disabled students are disadvantaged because of their disabilities, they must also ensure that a qualification gives a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of the person who holds it, and that public confidence in the qualification is maintained. The purpose of 'reasonable adjustments' is not to change the nature of the qualification, but to provide students with a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Ofqual runs an Access Consultation Forum that brings together representatives from awarding organisations, disability groups, the UK qualifications regulators and other disability stakeholders to consider issues affecting disabled students taking regulated qualifications in the UK, in particular, access arrangements and the development and delivery of inclusive qualifications. It is an advisory and consultative body designed to consider potential solutions to current issues and share information and good practice.

It is important for all pupils to have a grasp of the basics, including those with special educational needs such as dyslexia. Central to this is quality teaching to

ensure that pupils with SEND are given the best possible opportunity to develop key knowledge and skills. This also gives an incentive to teachers to provide effective support to all their students to improve their written communication skills.

We have contracted with Nasen and University College London (UCL), on behalf of the Whole School SEND consortium, to embed SEND into school improvement practice. New SEND regional leads are bringing together practitioners and networks in their local area to build a Community of Practice, help identify regional SEND school improvement priorities and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise. Further information about the work of the Whole School SEND Consortium is available here www.sendgateway.org.uk/whole-school-send/.

From 2011 to 2018, the Department funded the British Dyslexia Association, and other organisations to provide a wealth of resources to assist schools and local authorities in the early identification and support of children who have dyslexia. These materials are available on the Nasen SEND Gateway.

Exams and other assessments are an essential part of ensuring that young people have acquired the knowledge and skills they need in order to succeed in further study and in later life. Schools should provide appropriate support as part of a whole school approach to supporting the wellbeing and resilience of pupils. Ofqual has also recently published a series of blogs about test anxiety, and a guide for students to coping with exam pressure.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 15 October 2019

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Special Representative on UK Victims of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA Terrorism: Indemnity ..	7WS	Legislative Programme	12WS

PETITION

Tuesday 15 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	3P
GCSEs & dyslexia	3P

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**not later than
Tuesday 22 October 2019**

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