

**Monday  
13 January 2020**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 13 January 2020**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 13 January 2020*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### SESSIONAL RETURNS

*Ordered,*

That there be laid before this House Returns for Session 2019 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions)
- (3) Sittings of the House
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business
- (5) Public Bills
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders
- (7) European Legislation, etc
- (8) Grand Committees
- (9) Panel of Chairs
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Local Government Finance

1. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government funding for local authorities in England.

[900100]

13. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government funding for local authorities in England.

[900113]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall):** Next year's settlement for local government responds to the pressures facing councils by providing access to the largest year-on-year increase in spending power for a decade. Core spending power is expected to rise from £46.2 billion to £49.1 billion in 2020-21—an estimated 4.4% real-terms increase.

**Jeff Smith:** Big-city authorities such as Manchester have been hit hardest by the cuts at the same time as they have had to deal with the extra costs of deprivation, such as high demand on social care budgets, poor health, and homelessness, with big cities being magnets

for homeless people from the wider region. What guarantees can the Minister give that those pressures will be reflected properly in the new funding formula?

**Luke Hall:** Manchester City Council will receive a £30.9 million increase in the provisional settlement—a 7% rise that includes 17.6% in additional adult social care grant. Decisions on the future funding formula are to be taken in the weeks ahead, but we will release some provisional figures in the coming weeks for working groups to look at.

**Judith Cummins:** If the Government are to deliver on their commitment to the north, combined authorities must receive fair funding. The Government have promised to level up throughout the country, so will the Minister confirm that in any new devolution deal funding for West Yorkshire Combined Authority will match that of any other combined authority, such as Greater Manchester, on a per-head basis?

**Luke Hall:** Negotiations on the deal are ongoing, but we are optimistic. We can confirm that Bradford Council will receive an increase of £25.6 million in the settlement—a 6.4% real-terms rise in core spending power on last year.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): One local government problem that is becoming more expensive is the repair and reopening of Hammersmith bridge. On that and the reopening of Harwood Terrace, will my hon. Friend tell the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to get on with it so that we can get traffic moving again in west London? Will my hon. Friend or the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss the matter?

**Luke Hall:** My right hon. Friend has been working hard on this issue on behalf of his constituents, and I am happy to meet him to discuss it in the weeks ahead.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): May I welcome the real-terms increase for local authorities over the next two years, which is the result of our balanced approach to the economy? Will my hon. Friend update the House on the steps his Department is taking to make councils more efficient?

**Luke Hall:** May I welcome my hon. Friend to his place in the House? He is already looking to be a champion for his community. We are of course working with local authorities to make sure that they can become more efficient, especially in respect of digital transformation. My hon. Friend's local authority and those throughout the country will have access in the coming year to the 4.4% real-terms rise in core spending power.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Happy new year to you, Mr Speaker.

It is 173 days—almost 25 weeks or almost six months—since the Secretary of State was appointed, so it is nice that we finally have local government questions. With local government in crisis, children's services, which are included in that, are also in crisis. According to the Tory-led Local Government Association, the number of children in care is up 28%, child protection plans are up 53%, and there has been a staggering 139% increase in

serious cases. With the funding gap growing to £3.1 billion by 2025, sticking plasters will not do, so will the Minister now commit finally to fix this crisis and ensure that his Chancellor fully funds children's services in future?

**Luke Hall:** This is the best provisional local government settlement for almost 10 years: a 4.4% rise in real-terms funding and a £2.9 billion increase in local government spending. We propose to allow local authorities to set council tax increases of up to 2%, and another 2% for adult social care. It is a positive settlement and I hope the hon. Gentleman will support it in the weeks ahead.

### **Building Better, Building Beautiful**

2. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to simplify the planning system and implement the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful initiative. [900101]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick):** We want a planning system that encourages beautiful development, guards against ugliness and is based on stewardship and place-making. That is why we convened the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, which submitted its report to me in December.

May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the commission's co-chair, Sir Roger Scruton, who died yesterday? Sir Roger was an intellectual giant, a brilliant writer and a fearless fighter for freedom, not least in eastern Europe, and he made a unique contribution to public life.

**Mrs Latham:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, and I associate myself with his remarks about Sir Roger Scruton.

Will the Secretary of State confirm whether he will implement the Letwin review and whether his Department plans to capture development value to fund infrastructure as well as encourage sustainable building with very high-quality design? Will he meet me and a delegation from the Academy of Urbanism to discuss these ideas?

**Robert Jenrick:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. We are currently reviewing the recommendations of the commission and I shall respond in due course. I would be very happy to meet her and representatives from the Academy for Urbanism.

As regards capturing uplifts in land value, local planning authorities already use section 106 and the community infrastructure levy to pay for crucial affordable housing and infrastructure, and, as a result of changes we have made recently, there will shortly be greater transparency so that residents can see where this money is going.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I have absolutely no idea whether co-operative housing is likely to benefit from the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful initiative, but by my definition it certainly should. Would the Secretary of State be willing to meet me and a small delegation from the co-op housing movement to see whether there can be a replication here in the UK of the successes that co-ops have had in the US in housing veterans and other people?

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman. The recommendations of the commission that we will publish shortly speak to all forms of housing, including co-operative housing and social housing, where, of course, there have been some fantastic examples of good-quality design, not least the RIBA award-winning new social homes in Norwich.

**Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): The question refers to simplifying the planning system, but one of its many complications is that there is no standard methodology for calculating five-year land supply. Will the Government look at this and please address the problem pretty quickly?

**Robert Jenrick:** We will be giving that further thought. The Government are committed to bringing forward a new White Paper on planning reform. I will work closely with the Chancellor to draw up those proposals, and I would be very happy to speak with my hon. Friend and take his views as we do so.

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): May I welcome the Secretary of State back? Given the turnover of Housing Ministers, I trust that his first oral questions in the post will not also be his last. The Conservatives' failure on planning is at the heart of their failure on housing. Their permitted development loophole lets developers sidestep the planning rules and build modern-day slum housing. It has been in place for four years now, so can he say whether the number of new affordable homes being built has gone up or down directly as a result of this planning change?

**Robert Jenrick:** May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks? Permitted development rights are subject to a review, and we have consulted stakeholders. He is right to say that there are some examples of poor practice, and I will carefully consider the information we have received before coming forward with proposals. Those rights have led to a large number of net additions that would not otherwise have been brought forward. That is important, and it is a contributing factor to the fact that, last year, we delivered more homes than any other for 30 years. Therefore, the planning reforms taken forward by my predecessors, which I will take forward with my new White Paper, have contributed to getting the homes built in this country that we desperately need.

**John Healey:** For the record, the number of new social rented homes is at a near record low. Rather than the net additions that the Secretary of State talks about, the Conservative-led Local Government Association says that this policy has led directly to 13,500 fewer new affordable homes. It hits at the heart of the Tory failure on housing: the rules are loosened so that big builders profit while renters and buyers on ordinary incomes lose out. Every Conservative MP should know that they have lost the argument on housing. With Ipsos MORI showing a 17 point lead for Labour over the Conservatives on housing, people know the country has a housing crisis and they know the Conservatives are failing to fix it. The Secretary of State had nothing to say on housing at the election, so what will the Government now do differently to win public confidence on housing?

**Robert Jenrick:** The right hon. Gentleman is on dangerous ground talking about the general election. He managed to take one of Labour's safest seats to a marginal seat, and his colleague—the other shadow Secretary of State—was the co-ordinator of the Labour party's general election campaign. The facts speak for themselves: last year we built more homes in this country than in any other year for 30 years; we built 1 million homes in the last Parliament and will build at least 1 million homes in the next Parliament; more affordable homes were built under this Conservative Government than under the last Labour Government; and we built more council houses last year than in the 13 years of the last Labour Government.

### New Homes

4. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the time taken to build new homes. [900103]

12. **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the time taken to build new homes. [900111]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick):** We have delivered more than 1.5 million new homes since 2010 and last year saw the highest level of delivery in over 30 years, but there is more to do. Later this year I will publish a White Paper on planning reform, an objective of which will be a simpler and faster system for the benefit of everyone, including homeowners, and small and medium-sized builders.

**Mark Pawsey:** Conservative-led Rugby Borough Council has ambitious plans for social housing in Rugby, replacing unpopular old tower blocks with new, traditional housing. How can the Minister help the council to get on with this as quickly as possible? In particular, what discussions has he had with Treasury colleagues about the interest rate available from the Public Works Loan Board for projects such as this, which provide a very clear social benefit?

**Robert Jenrick:** We want to build more homes of all types. We have delivered 464,000 new affordable homes since 2010, and we have abolished the housing revenue account cap and established a five-year rent deal. Councils can secure grant funding from the existing affordable homes programme, and I am pleased to say that Rugby Borough Council is benefiting from that. In our manifesto, we said that we would create a successor to the affordable homes programme that is at least as generous. Finance from the Public Works Loan Board plays an important role in these investments. In October the Treasury made an extra £10 billion of lending available, and the interest rate remains very favourable, returning only to 2018 levels.

**Sally-Ann Hart:** The housing White Paper provided that developers should start to build within two years of securing planning permission. Will the Minister update the House on what progress has been made to ensure that developers build the homes we need and do not sit on land?

**Robert Jenrick:** I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. We want to see new homes built as soon as possible once planning permission is granted. She is right to refer to the previous housing White Paper, and this matter will be an important element of the forthcoming planning White Paper. Developers and authorities should be working closely together locally to deliver this, and I will look at whatever is necessary, including amending legislation, to ensure that we build the homes this country needs, and that we do so quickly.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): The climate emergency is real and we need to tackle it. Building new homes to a net zero standard must be at the heart of the solution. What action are this new Government going to take?

**Robert Jenrick:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We have committed to the future homes standard, which means that no new home will be built in this country from 2025 unless it has the highest levels of energy efficiency, and low or zero-carbon heating. We are consulting on that and further proposals will be brought forward shortly, meaning that planning applications will be made very shortly for those homes to be delivered post 2025. This will be a major change in the delivery of homes across the country, and a very welcome one.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Thousands of new homes are due to be built at Maghull in my constituency. The developers are reluctant to build an access road, which means that construction traffic will now have to use totally unsuitable residential and rural roads. The experience in Maghull is all too typical. Does this not just show the problems with the planning system that favour developers over existing communities?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am happy to look into the instance that the hon. Gentleman raises. These matters are usually dealt with by councils in the planning conditions that they choose to set. The role in this for central Government is ensuring that infrastructure flows first—that was one of our manifesto commitments—so that GP surgeries, roads and schools flow at an appropriate time. We are going to take that forward. In the previous Parliament we created the housing infrastructure fund, which was a huge success and has delivered billions of pounds of infrastructure. We have committed to create a new version of that, which the Chancellor and I will be announcing shortly and will be larger and longer-term than its predecessor.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in your Chair, Mr Speaker.

I thank the Secretary of State for recently visiting Telford. It was very much appreciated that he came to a new-build development where we have been having some difficult issues. As a new town, Telford experiences a very rapid rate of house building that can be overwhelming for communities and for local services. What steps is his Department taking to ensure good practice by developers and adequate local services for residents?

**Robert Jenrick:** It was a pleasure to visit Telford—a town that, as my hon. Friend knows, I know well. Telford is one of the fastest-growing towns in the country. While there are many examples of good-quality development—she took me to Lightmoor Village, being built with

the Bournville Village Trust—there have been examples, on which she has fought for her constituents, of poor-quality development. Developers need to build high-quality, well-designed and safe homes, and we will take the steps necessary to ensure that they do. One step we are taking forward is the creation of a new homes ombudsman, which has been led in recent months by—now—my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mrs Elphicke). We will put that on a statutory footing in due course.

### Council Homes

5. **Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of new council homes since 2010. [900104]

**The Minister for Housing (Esther McVey):** Councils built 26,185 affordable homes between 2010-11 and 2018-19, up from just 2,994 over the previous 13 years under a Labour Administration. We are giving councils the tools to deliver a new generation of council housing. In 2018, we lifted the borrowing caps for councils to deliver 10,000 new homes a year by 2021-22.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** But last year 6,287 homes for social rent were built and 10,000 were lost due to right to buy and other conversions. That was a loss of 4,000 social rented homes in our country. Is it not time, first, that the Government used net figures rather than these fantasy “built” figures; and, secondly, that we really reviewed right to buy, allowing councils good conditions and restrictions where there are areas of stress and ensuring that the discount carries on rather than just being pocketed by the individual?

**Esther McVey:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that we are consulting on right to buy to see what we can do with the sales receipts. Let me say what this Government have done to support councils in building. We increased to £9 billion the size of the affordable homes programme to which councils can apply. We have reintroduced social rents. We have removed the HRA borrowing caps for local authorities and given £2 billion to housing authorities to help with the ability to increase purchases and build by councils. So this Government are doing far more. Under this Government, social housing has gone up by 79,000, but in the previous 13 years under Labour it fell by 420,000.

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): There are currently over 20,000 people on the council housing waiting list in Cornwall, yet we are in the ridiculous situation where private pension providers can invest in business development but not in residential development. Will the Secretary of State look at making representations to the Treasury to allow pension providers to invest in social residential housing?

**Esther McVey:** My hon. Friend makes a very good suggestion. That is exactly what the Secretary of State will be looking at—how we get that investment into the housing structure. Under this Government, council housing waiting lists have come down by nearly half a million.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): If the Minister is keen to talk about what is happening elsewhere, she will be interested to know that in the last five years, the

SNP Government in Scotland have built 80% more affordable housing per head of population than England and twice as much as Wales. When will the British Government catch on to the fact that the housing crisis will not be solved unless they invest adequately in social rented housing?

**Esther McVey:** Obviously, this is a devolved matter, but I want to look at what this Government have done. We have delivered many more affordable homes—nearly 460,000. That is what this Government are all about—ensuring that people have the homes they need when they need them. We are looking to extend all types of home. We are tenure-blind, and we are delivering more homes.

**David Linden:** That is all good and well, but there is no point when the Conservative party manifesto commits to promoting and extending the right to buy—one of Margaret Thatcher’s biggest disasters in terms of policy. In Scotland, we ended the right to buy, protecting existing social rented homes and preventing the sale of 15,500 homes over a decade. Why can the Minister not see and understand that it is totally senseless to build new social housing, only to flog it off afterwards?

**Esther McVey:** We believe in home ownership. The right to buy has helped 2 million people get on the housing ladder. Since 2010, nearly 600,000 households have been helped to purchase a home through either right to buy or help to buy, and we are ensuring that the money from the right to buy is helping more homes to be built. In fact, we have sold 119,000 homes, which has helped to build 140,000 more homes. That is what we will continue to do—allow people to own their own homes and support all people at every stage of life in every home they need.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): The Minister is completely right that the housing supply jigsaw has many pieces, so we will continue to pump billions of pounds into housing associations such as Walsall Housing Group in my constituency, which has an innovative partnership with Lovell to build 250 mixed tenure houses on the former Caparo engineering works, a brownfield site. Is that the future?

**Esther McVey:** It certainly is. My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head, and he has a lot of expertise in this area. As I have said, our party is tenure-blind, and we help people along the steps to ownership, to get the house they need at the time they need it, knowing that most people want to own their own home.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is the aspiration of every individual in this country to own their own home, but many local authorities that have built council housing have deliberately set up housing companies to frustrate the right to buy. Will my right hon. Friend look at outlawing that practice, so that people who are tenants in their homes get the right to buy and own their own home?

**Esther McVey:** We will look closely at anybody who is frustrating people’s dream and desire to own their own home. We will continue with the right to buy. We will look at how those receipts are being used, so that we can

maximise the new homes being built. Under Labour, 170 right-to-buy receipts bought one new home. Now, we are getting more homes built through the right to buy, and having sold 119,000 homes, we have built 140,000 more.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): The Conservatives' deep cuts to new council and social housing are part of the reason why homelessness has risen so rapidly over the last 10 years. Every day, hundreds of us see the increasing number of homeless people and their belongings in Westminster station and outside this building, but their plight is the same as that of thousands of others across the country who find themselves trying to find somewhere dry and safe to sleep. Does the Minister accept that, if the Tories had simply continued building social rented homes at the level left by Labour, there would now be 200,000 more social rented homes for those who need them, including those who are homeless on Parliament's doorstep?

**Esther McVey:** What we all know is that, for a long period, demand has outstripped supply. That is why this Government are building more homes, with more homes built in the last year than in the last 30 years. We have delivered 1.5 million more homes since 2010, and we will continue to do that. Of course, we have also brought in initiatives for rough sleeping and homeless people. We have to be fully aware of that, and this Conservative Government are doing a lot more to help those people.

#### Local Government Funding: Crime and Disorder

6. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the effect of reductions in funding for local government on levels of crime and disorder. [900105]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall):** This Department has ongoing discussions with the Home Office on multiple issues, including tackling crime. The provisional local government finance settlement confirmed an increase of £2.9 billion in resources for local government this year. This Government are also providing targeted funding support for partnership working between the police, councils and other partners.

**Daniel Zeichner:** The front five pages of the *Cambridge News* today detail a series of knife crime incidents, drug dealing and general social disorder, which is causing huge concern to my constituents. When I talk to the police about it, they tell me that one of the key reasons is the cuts to all those preventive, early intervention services that have happened over the last few years. Can the Government today please look again at those cuts to local government? They are not cost-effective; they are costing us more and causing huge crime levels and misery.

**Luke Hall:** I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I know that he raises crime in his constituency regularly in the House, including in his Westminster Hall debate late last year. The real-terms increase in the funding settlement for next year does recognise the critical services that councils are delivering, including keeping communities safe. As part of the

Government's drive to recruit 20,000 police officers across the country, 62 are already being recruited in his force area. I am very happy to work with him and discuss it with him in the weeks ahead.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is with great regret that Humberside's Labour police and crime commissioner allowed Winterton police station to close. In contrast to that, Conservative-run North Lincolnshire and East Riding of Yorkshire Councils have funded a very innovative safe and sound grant to help elderly residents to stay safe in their home with free security. Is not the real challenge that simply not enough councils and police forces are working closely enough together to share resources, and will the Minister do more to ensure that they do?

**Luke Hall:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He raises a really important point about the need for councils and police forces to work together. I commend the work that his Conservative police and crime commissioner is doing, and I highlight the Government's commitment to recruit 20,000 police officers across our country, with 6,000 police officers being recruited in the next year.

#### Leasehold Property

7. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What plans the Government have to bring forward legislative proposals to reform leasehold property. [900106]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick):** We are committed to reforming the leasehold market so that it is fairer for consumers and the abuses that we have seen in recent years are addressed. To achieve this, we have a comprehensive programme of reform, and we are moving forward with legislation, beginning with the Bill set out in the Queen's Speech banning new leasehold houses and reducing ground rents on future leases to zero.

**Dr Huq:** The Secretary of State says he is committed to reform. Since 2015, I have come across countless cases of people trapped on iniquitous terms in relation to ground rent, cladding—you name it—and unable to extend without paying through the nose. In that same time, however, the Government have had seven consultations, and there is no concrete legislation about anything they are actually going to do. Can he tell us when he will end this feudal hangover, which is unique to England, once and for all?

**Robert Jenrick:** The hon. Lady is incorrect. The Queen's Speech made it clear that we will be bringing forward legislation. We intend to publish a draft Bill shortly, which will take the first steps that I have just described. We are also awaiting the next report of the Law Commission. We have just received one on enfranchisement. It is a very important issue, and I certainly want to take forward its recommendations to ensure a simpler and fairer system. The next report of the Law Commission will be on commonhold. Again, we will be paying close attention to that. At our encouragement, the Competition and Markets Authority is now looking into the mis-selling

of leaseholds, which is another important issue. Be under no illusion: we will be taking forward leasehold reform, and soon.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and his predecessors for the work they have done in commissioning work from the Law Commission that will provide a guide to the way forward. May I put it to the Secretary of State that, as his representatives at the all-party group meeting last week will confirm, there is a whole range of strong issues—the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) mentioned them—and that the Government, the Select Committee and the whole House need to make sure there is action, not just good intentions?

**Robert Jenrick:** I thank the Father of the House for the work he has done over many years on this issue. I campaigned on this before I became a Minister. I have seen a number of abuses with respect to leasehold properties, and we want to take action. Now is the time for action. We have the first report from the Law Commission. There will be a further one. There will then be the report from the CMA. Together with the evidence, we will take this into careful consideration and move forward to reform leasehold and put it on a more sustainable footing for the future.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As many of us heard at a meeting here on Thursday night and many of us know from our case load, so many people are caught in really difficult circumstances because of the issue of cladding. Those leaseholders are mortgage prisoners or their properties are valued at zero. Will the Secretary of State give them some assurance that the Government are taking this seriously and will act fast, because people's lives are unable to move on while they await a decision on the second type of cladding?

**Robert Jenrick:** I appreciate the issue the hon. Lady has raised, and I read about the meeting of the all-party group the other day. This is a very serious challenge; I am aware of a number of leaseholders who are struggling to find the finance required to make the necessary changes to their homes. We are giving this careful consideration. We have already provided £600 million for those living in high-rise buildings with ACM cladding so that that work can now proceed at pace, and I will certainly meet with any of the hon. Lady's constituents who might wish to discuss what further steps the Government can take to unblock this important issue.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May I press my right hon. Friend: will he reassure leaseholders in North West Leicestershire and across the country that the Government will set up a mechanism for them to seek proper redress for their genuine grievances?

**Robert Jenrick:** Yes, we will.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The Secretary of State rightly refers to action, but when? That is the key question my constituents are asking in the Winnington part of Weaver Vale and Sandymoor. We have had consultation upon consultation; when will there be action? We need action now, not careful consideration.

**Robert Jenrick:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and the north-west has been particularly badly affected by this. The statistics suggest that new-build homes in the north-west peaked at as high as 71% of all new homes being built in 2017—in the first quarter of that year. That has now fallen very considerably as a result of the actions and the statements of this Government and the general anger across this House and across the country at the abuses; that has now fallen to as low as 8%, but we will be legislating and we will outlaw these practices.

### High Streets

8. **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for high streets. [900107]

9. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for high streets. [900108]

11. **Jane Stevenson** (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for high streets. [900110]

15. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for high streets. [900115]

20. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for high streets. [900121]

**The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth (Jake Berry):** This Government are committed to supporting high streets and local leaders up and down the country, and we are doing that through our £1 billion future high street fund, which is part of our larger £3.6 billion towns fund.

As this is our first questions after the festive season I want to take this opportunity to thank all the shopworkers who worked so hard over the Christmas period to enable us to deliver our Christmas presents—and particularly, if I may, Mr Speaker, the workers in the RSPCA shop on Bank Street who sold me the very natty tie I am wearing for 50p only last Friday.

**Mr Speaker:** You ought to make a donation.

**Nickie Aiken:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply—and I think his tie is very blue.

My constituency, Cities of London and Westminster, is home to Oxford Street, often referred to as the nation's high street. Given that local authorities rely heavily on business rate receipts to help encourage more investment into the high street, what plans do the Government have to give councils greater fiscal powers to invest business rates locally?

**Jake Berry:** What an excellent question; I would like to start by welcoming my hon. Friend to her place, and her question is a sign of the expertise that can be brought into this House when we have people with long experience in local government. She will know that

local government can currently retain 50% of business rates revenue growth, and councils are able to work with those retained business rates and see what they can do to improve their local areas. I know that as a new and robust Member of this House my hon. Friend will continue her work with Westminster City Council to make sure that that happens.

**Mike Wood:** Towns like Brierley Hill in Dudley South have struggled to compete with nearby retail parks, and also now increasingly with more shopping moving online. Will my right hon. Friend do everything he can to help towns like Brierley Hill adapt to modern economic challenges and also make those town centres places where people want to be?

**Jake Berry:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Brierley Hill, I am sure to celebrate the fact that it is one of the first 100 places under our future high street fund to receive £150,000 revenue funding to work on the exciting plans to ensure our high streets are fit for the future. My hon. Friend, who is, I think, still the chairman of the all-party group on beer, will be working very hard to make sure our pubs are protected, and we can have micropubs up and down the land.

**Jane Stevenson:** In recent years Wolverhampton city centre and, in my constituency, local centres such as Wednesfield high street have struggled. I am delighted that Wolverhampton city centre will benefit from the Government's stronger towns fund, but will the Minister work with me so that local traders and retail businesses all over Wolverhampton North East, including market traders in Wednesfield high street—

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Is Wolverhampton a city?

**Jane Stevenson:** It is a city. Will the Minister work with me so that they feel confident that the Government will support their hard work and further local regeneration?

**Jake Berry:** I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend is looking forward to playing an active role both in her high street and stronger towns fund bid. The idea behind this is to bring together leaders and communities—Members of Parliament, council leaders, business leaders and third sector groups—to come up with a long-term plan for the improvement of their towns. Whichever side of the House Members sit on, that is absolutely something they will want to see for the area they represent. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend as she takes that role forward.

**James Cartlidge:** Speaking to traditional retailers during the election campaign, it is clear that future business rates is a massive issue for them. There is, in particular, a sense that there is not a level playing field between them and the increasingly dominant and massive digital retailers. Will the review of business rates, which we promised in our manifesto, be looking at that?

**Jake Berry:** I welcome my hon. Friend back. He has been a redoubtable campaigner in the area of business rates in his time in Parliament. Working with him and through him, the Government have, since 2016, introduced a £13 billion cut in business rates over the next five years.

Should we in this Parliament seek to go further and faster? Yes. We are going to review business rates and I am sure my hon. Friend will play an active role in that review.

**Peter Aldous:** Leading on from the issue raised by my fellow colleague from Suffolk, Beales has stores in both Lowestoft and Beccles in my constituency. It is clear that the crippling impact of business rates has been a significant contributory factor to the difficulties it is currently facing. I acknowledge the rates relief the Government have provided to smaller businesses, but may I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure, in the review of business rates that is due to take place, that the Government not only consider root and branch reform but the replacement of rates, too?

**Jake Berry:** My hon. Friend, as a chartered surveyor, is an expert in this area and, like our parliamentary colleague, he has campaigned vigorously and continuously. In terms of the review, everything is going to be reviewed. It will be a joint review between my Department and the Treasury. All ideas, from all sides of the House, about how we improve the health of our high streets and our business community more generally, will certainly be taken on board.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I want to return to the question from the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), which I do not think the Minister really answered. In the previous Parliament, a unanimously agreed Select Committee report—I think it was generally well received, apart from the response from the Government which was a bit lukewarm—recommended that we address the fundamental imbalance whereby Amazon pays 0.7% of its turnover in business rates and high street shops pay between 2% and 6%. That unfairness needs to be addressed. Will the Government now commit, as part of their business rate review, to look at that unfairness and at how we can rebalance tax, so that digital sales pay more and high street sales pay less?

**Jake Berry:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman will not complain if I just take the opportunity to wish him a happy birthday. What a great question to ask on his birthday. If he listened to the answers I gave, I was absolutely clear that this will be a fundamental and wide-ranging review of business rates. All arguments, including those set out in the report by the Select Committee he chaired in the previous Parliament, will be taken into account. Perhaps, if he gets a spare moment this evening in between blowing out candles, he can read the relevant passage of the Conservative manifesto, which is pretty clear on this point.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I spoke to the previous Secretary of State to ask for Knottingley in my constituency to be included in the towns fund, because the high street is under great pressure and has been heavily hit by public service cuts and Government spending cuts in the last few years. We have lost not only the last bank and local shops, but the sports centre, the library, the Sure Start centre, much policing and local youth services. Knottingley has not been included and, frankly, that means that it is not getting a fair deal. Will the Minister ask the Secretary of

State to meet me and see what can be done to make sure that Government investment can go back into Knottingley town centre and that we can get a fair deal for the town?

**Jake Berry:** I will happily meet the right hon. Lady.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I remind the Minister that it is not only high streets but our town centres that are under pressure and in decline all over our country, and this is not just about business rates, but about notable buildings. Mr Speaker, you will know about the George hotel, where rugby league was founded 125 years ago—the anniversary is coming up next year. It cannot be renovated and has lain empty and idle for years. Surely the compulsory purchase order system could be improved to give local authorities the ability to take a significant building in any town centre and do something about it.

**Jake Berry:** The planning White Paper will come out after the conclusion of the debate on the Queen's Speech, and, looking at how CPO works in our town centres and other parts of the country will be part of the consultation. On the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, it would seem to me a crying shame if this issue could not be dealt with, as we head towards the rugby league world cup. If he would like to come to see me, I will certainly make it my job to do so.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, it was a pleasure to see your journey down here with Patrick the cat and Boris the parrot a couple of days ago—a preening, repetitive, attention-seeking Boris; I am sure he will fit in quite well here.

Our high streets and town centres are in crisis, with more shops closing than opening. The Government keep falling way below what is needed to take real action that will make a difference. When will they take real action to address the fundamental weakness of our business taxation system to give our high streets and town centres a fighting chance? As a practical suggestion, why not look at enterprise-type zones for our town centres with incentives to make sure that they have a future?

**Jake Berry:** In terms of practical action, the £3.6 billion towns fund seems to be a good place to start. When we add to that the £13 billion that we are saving for businesses in business rates, we are certainly making some progress, but I will go away and look at the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about high street enterprise zones.

### Topical Questions

T1. [900140] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick):** From Kensington to Sedgefield, and from Workington to Wrexham, this Government were elected to represent all parts of the country. My Department is focused on repaying that trust by levelling up every community with a renewed focus on those areas that have been overlooked and undervalued for too long. We will ensure that local government is properly supported to deliver the services that we all rely on with the best financial settlement in a

decade. We will keep building the homes that this country needs with investment in infrastructure and affordable housing, while making the dream of home ownership a reality for everyone, and we will redouble our efforts to bring about the biggest change in building safety for a generation.

**Gareth Johnson:** This year, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the world war two concentration camps. I ask the Secretary of State, in his communities role, what is being done to mark the occasion, and furthermore, what is being done to tackle antisemitism more generally wherever it occurs?

**Robert Jenrick:** On 23 January, I will accompany His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the holocaust forum at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps, which brought an end to the murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children, but as we know, did not bring an end to the cancer of antisemitism. The Government have provided an additional £2.2 million for schools to teach lessons from Auschwitz and £1.7 million for visits to Bergen-Belsen, the camp liberated by British troops. I will continue to champion the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, including requiring all councils to adopt it forthwith.

**Mr Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Council funding cuts under this Government have created a shortage of safe accommodation for vulnerable children, and now thousands of at-risk young people are being placed in care homes that are illegal, miles from their school or unregulated. Does the Secretary of State agree that responsibility for this injustice lies at the feet of his Government?

**Robert Jenrick:** We have recently published, and will be debating shortly, the most generous settlement for local government for a decade. It will provide a 4.4% real-terms increase in funding for local government and will include a £1 billion grant for social care. These are important issues that we need to take forward. I am aware of some issues with supported housing, for example, and the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall), is taking that forward, but as a result of the economic renewal that the country is undergoing, after almost a decade of economic growth, we are now able to invest more in local government. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and all Members of the House will support the local government settlement next month.

T2. [900141] **Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the excellent market town of Marlow for its thriving high street, with local stores such as FourState, which sources eco-friendly, sustainable and ethical products, and what is his Department doing to provide a better deal for towns and high streets that have been overlooked and undervalued by Whitehall for far too long?

**The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth (Jake Berry):** I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. I know that she, together with the Centre for Social Justice, has been active in this area for many

years, which is why I am delighted to tell her that we have a £3.6 billion towns fund, which will support an initial 100 town deals across England, together with the £1 billion future high streets fund. We are working with local government up and down this land to ensure we fight for the future health of our high streets.

T5. [900144] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Last week it was reported that the new Minister for Housing was lobbying the Secretary of State for more funding for council house investment as opposed to failed ownership schemes. Does the Secretary of State agree with the case she was making?

**Robert Jenrick:** As I have already said in previous answers, the Government want to build more homes of all types. If we are to tackle the housing crisis, we will need to spend more on infrastructure, which we are doing; further reform the planning system, which I intend to do; and invest more in affordable housing, and we have already invested £9 billion through our affordable housing programme and made a manifesto commitment to introduce another one that is even larger. But do I believe that people in this country fundamentally want to own a home of their own? Yes, I do, and we will do all we can to help more people on the housing ladder.

T3. [900142] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): As my right hon. Friend has mentioned, this is the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Will he join me in commending the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which does such brilliant work to enable survivors to inform young people about the horrors of antisemitism and where it ultimately leads? Will he also join me and others in signing the book of commitment in the House of Commons so that we can eradicate racism and antisemitism wherever they rear their ugly head?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend, who has campaigned on this issue for many years, speaks for the whole House. I will of course be signing the book. I am informed by the Leader of the House that there will be a debate in the House on or around Holocaust Memorial Day in the usual way. We must all continue to fight the cancer of antisemitism, in all its forms, on every occasion, and this Government will always do that.

T6. [900145] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The Minister will know that when the north prospers the nation prospers, and a recent independent study showed that the One Yorkshire devolution project could bring £30 billion to our region's economy, so will he finally allow us to bring power home by letting One Yorkshire devolution go ahead?

**Jake Berry:** I am sure that, like me, the hon. Lady is delighted that one of the first policy commitments of our new Prime Minister before the general election was to say that we should have devolution—mayoral at that—across the whole of the north of England, and I am delighted to report that we are not only proceeding well with negotiations in West Yorkshire but having good discussions with South Yorkshire—*[Interruption.]* The rest of Yorkshire is in discussions with us as well.

*[Interruption.]* As I do not think the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) knows, given that he represents Brighton—though he is chuntering from a sedentary position about One Yorkshire—proposals have been submitted to the Government, but the area did not meet the requirement to having a coherent economic geography. I am pleased, however, that we are able to forge ahead with all forms of devolution in Yorkshire. What happens in Brighton we will have to wait and see.

T4. [900143] **Laura Trott** (Sevenoaks) (Con): My constituency is 93% green belt. My district council has put together a plan that meets 90% of housing need while protecting the green belt. The planning inspector is indicating the plan should not be adopted. Will the Minister urgently look into the conduct of the Planning Inspectorate in this matter?

**The Minister for Housing (Esther McVey):** I welcome my hon. Friend to these Benches. She will be a terrific addition to this place, and I am delighted that she is dedicated to the green belt and supporting her constituents. That is only right, and the Government, too, are committed to that. Planning inspectors are appointed to independently examine plans. Given my quasi-judicial role in the planning system, it would not be appropriate for me to speak on this matter, but I cheer my hon. Friend on in all she does for her constituency.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Government's consultation on closing the loophole that allows second home owners to avoid paying any council tax whatever by pretending to be a small business ended 12 months ago. Will the Government take action to protect communities in south lakes and elsewhere, or have they decided not to bother?

**Esther McVey:** We will absolutely help communities like the hon. Member's. The Government have removed the requirement to offer council tax discounts on second homes amounting to 75% of the full rate. He is quite right: the consultation closes on 16 January, and then we will make decisions on it. If he would like to discuss his suggestions with me, I will gladly meet him.

T7. [900146] **Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): There has been a lot of talk about the blue wall of the north; less, however, has been said about the blue doughnut of Nottinghamshire. Can my right hon. Friend reassure the people of Rushcliffe that this one nation Conservative Government will deliver on our promises to support communities and businesses across the east midlands, to truly get the midlands engine revving in top gear?

**Robert Jenrick:** I welcome my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour to the House. I think she is the first new Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe for 49 years. She has a lot to live up to, but I look forward to working with her as we power up the midlands engine. I think her constituency was the only Conservative constituency in the county of Nottinghamshire in 1997. Today, all the constituencies are Conservative. One area that we will of course work on together is delivery of the new development co-operation at Ratcliffe power station, which is a brilliant opportunity for the whole country.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Across the country, children's care is in crisis. The Secretary of State made welcome reference to the funding settlement, which provides some relief, but that is for the next financial year. Can the Minister confirm that the extra funding will be provided in every year of this Parliament? Will the Government also continue to work with councils to ensure that funding settlements reflect the escalating demand for, and cost of, these services?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall)**: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question; I know how important this issue is in his constituency. I can certainly confirm that the social care grant will continue every year, including the additional £9.2 million for his local authority into the next year. I am very happy to meet him to discuss this further.

T8. [900147] **Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): I welcome the fact that house building is at a 30-year high under this Conservative Government, but my constituents and I are concerned by the extremely high local house building target. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how new homes in East Surrey will be supported by much needed investment in road, rail and GP provision?

**Esther McVey**: I welcome another hon. Friend to these Benches. She is quite right: we have to ensure that we have the right infrastructure. We pledged in the manifesto to ensure that infrastructure first, as set out in the Queen's Speech. We have the £5.5 billion housing infrastructure fund, but we will introduce a bigger, single housing infrastructure fund to provide the infrastructure that she rightly wants for her constituency and that other Members want for theirs.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Further to the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), may I suggest—given that the only difference in the

crisis facing many of our constituents is that they have problems with high pressure laminate or other forms of external cladding, as opposed to aluminium composite material—that it would be sensible to extend the coverage of the fund that the Government have established for the private sector to cover those blocks? Otherwise, the residents will face a very bleak future.

**Robert Jenrick**: I am grateful for the right hon. Member's comments, and I saw the early-day motion that he laid in the House to that effect, but we must be guided by the evidence. My predecessors chose to provide the £600 million remediation fund in relation to ACM in high-rise buildings because the expert panel which advises us had said that that was the urgent challenge that needed to be addressed. We have commissioned experts from the Building Research Establishment to carry out further tests on a range of materials, including HPL. I will publish the information shortly, and will say more at that time.

T10. [900149] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I declare an interest, as a member of the Crawley towns fund board.

Can my right hon. Friend say a little more about how he envisages the realisation of the £3.6 billion that the Government are investing in our town centres and high streets?

**Jake Berry**: I too declare an interest, as a member of the Darwen towns fund board.

I think that we shall be hearing a bit more about that as we work with Members of Parliament, local authorities, businesses and community groups, and ask them to come forward with exciting long-term plans for the rejuvenation of not just their high streets but their towns. We must all remember, Mr Speaker, that there is a reason why you no longer have a tallow merchant in the high street in Chorley. High streets and town centres have always been changing, but with our stronger towns fund we can ensure that we are the handmaidens of that dynamic change.

## Iran

3.31 pm

**Mr Tobias Ellwood** (Bournemouth East) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary to update the House on the security situation in Iran.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab)**: Further to the oral statement made by the Defence Secretary on 7 January, I will make a statement on Iran in response to the urgent question from my right hon. Friend.

Let me first express my condolences, and those of the Government, to the loved ones of those who tragically lost their lives on Ukrainian International Airlines flight PS752. Our thoughts are with all those affected during what must be a devastating time. Among the 176 passengers who tragically lost their lives were four British nationals, as well as 82 Iranians.

On 9 January we stated publicly—alongside partners such as Canada and the United States—that, given an increasing body of information, we believed that Iran was responsible for the downing of the aircraft. Despite initial denials, the Government of Iran acknowledged on 11 January that they were responsible. Now it is time for a full, transparent and independent investigation. It must be a collaborative endeavour, with a strong international component. The families of the victims—including those in Iran—must have answers, and must know the truth. The UK is also working with the Canadian-led International Coordination and Response Group, consisting of countries with nationals killed in the plane crash. The group will help with the issuing of visas and the repatriation of the bodies of the victims.

Separately, Her Majesty's ambassador to Iran, Rob Macaire, was arrested over the weekend, and was illegally held for three hours. On 11 January, the ambassador attended a public vigil to pay his respects to the victims of flight 752. He left shortly afterwards, when there were signs that the vigil might turn into a protest. Let me be very clear about this: he was not attending or recording a political protest or demonstration. His arrest later that day, without grounds or explanation, was a flagrant violation of international law. Today, in response, we will summon the Iranian ambassador to demand an apology, and to seek full assurances that this will not happen again.

Given the treatment of the ambassador, we are keeping security measures for the embassy under review, and, as I am sure the House would expect, we updated our travel advice on 10 January. We currently recommend that British nationals should not travel to Iran or take any flights to, from or within Iran. On the diplomatic front, in the past week I have met our international partners in Brussels, Washington and Montreal, and I attended an E3 meeting yesterday in Paris. I spoke to Foreign Minister Zarif on 6 January, and the Prime Minister spoke to President Rouhani on 9 January. We welcome the overwhelming international support for Her Majesty's ambassador to Iran, and for the rights to which all diplomats are entitled under the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations. The regime in Tehran is at a crossroads, and it can slip further and further into political and economic isolation, but there is an alternative.

The regime does have a choice. The diplomatic door remains open, and now is the time for Iran to engage in diplomacy and chart a peaceful way forward. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Ellwood**: I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. Tensions have clearly ratcheted up since the drone strike that killed General Soleimani and the Iranian reprisals. The Iranian President and the United States President have momentarily checked any further military aggression, but the wider issues relating to Iran's destabilising foreign policy ambitions remain. It still wants to advance its sectarian regional influence by funding, training and arming paramilitaries and militias right across the middle east, it has already restarted its nuclear programme, and it shamelessly attempted to cover up the missile strike against flight 752. This weekend, as the Secretary of State has just confirmed, it breached the Vienna convention by arresting our own ambassador in Tehran. I believe that these irresponsible actions are out of sync with the views of the people of Iran, who have once again bravely taken to the streets to vent their fury against the regime, the failing economy and the regime's international adventurism.

May I ask the Secretary of State to update the House on whether calls for full transparency in the crash investigation will be met? Will he also update us on the welfare and security of our ambassador, our diplomatic staff and their dependants in Tehran, and on how recent events will affect efforts to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe?

I commend the Prime Minister's efforts and those of the Foreign Secretary not to lose sight of the nuclear deal, but, as the former Foreign Minister responsible for the area, I should say that the last deal failed because no international investment could head Tehran's way due to the legacy sanctions connected to missile procurement, which prevented any bank, particularly those with US ties, from aiding economic reform. So Iran gained little from the deal, and the release of frozen assets worth \$150 billion plus new oil revenues were used not to support the ailing economy but to advance Iran's proxy wars. For a fresh deal to succeed, any new talks must cover missile sanctions and conditional economic reform.

Finally, may I ask what talks the UK has had with the US and other allies to ensure that we remain united and engaged? I believe that there is a leading role for the UK to play in resetting our middle east strategy towards Iran, first, by being more assertive in tackling proxy interference and weapons proliferation and, secondly, by being more proactive in offering conditional but genuine economic rehabilitation for Iran.

**Dominic Raab**: My right hon. Friend makes a range of powerful points, and I pay tribute to him for his experience in this area. He is right to say that there is a pattern of behaviour by the regime in Iran, which is flouting the basic rules of international law and not living up to the kind of conduct we would expect from any Government who want to be a responsible member of the international community. We have seen that on the nuclear side and with the announcement in the first week of January of further non-compliance in relation to some centrifuges. We have seen it in the destabilising activity for which General Soleimani was in large part

[*Dominic Raab*]

responsible when he was alive, and we have seen it in the treatment of dual nationals—in particular, but not limited to, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. We have seen it not just in the treatment of our ambassador in Iran but, more importantly, in the downing of the Ukrainian flight.

There must be some accountability for that wrongdoing. We welcome Iran's first step in acknowledging responsibility, but there must now be a full, thorough investigation into what happened, with an international component so that people can have faith and confidence in that process. At the same time, while we keep up the pressure and insist on accountability on the nuclear front and in relation to the airline, we also want to be clear that the diplomatic door is ajar. This is something that the US President and the French President have made clear, and this Government certainly fully support a diplomatic way through to de-escalating the tensions and seeking a long-term diplomatic resolution of all the outstanding issues.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Iran has now systematically failed to comply with the JCPOA. We are clear that we still support it. We have not signed up for the doctrine of maximum pressure. At the same time, the JCPOA has effectively been left a shell of an agreement because of systematic steps by Iran, taking it out of compliance. For it to be made to work, Iran must make a choice that it wants to come back to compliance and to the diplomatic negotiating table.

Finally, my right hon. Friend asked about the conversations we have had with our partners. I have spoken to Foreign Minister Zarif and I was in Brussels last week for meetings with the E3 and High Representative Josep Borrell. Indeed, I also saw them last night in Paris for further discussion. I was also in the US last week to talk to Secretary of State Pompeo and National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien. It is very important that we maintain transatlantic unity, because while we leave the diplomatic door ajar to the regime in Iran, we want to be absolutely crystal clear that the message it receives from the UK, the Europeans and the US is the same—namely, that there is a route forward for the Iranian Government and, most importantly, the Iranian people, if Iran takes steps to comply with the basic tenets of international law.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker, and may I congratulate the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) on securing it?

The events in Iran and Iraq that have followed the assassination of General Soleimani have been utterly appalling. They include the missile attacks on US bases in Iraq; Iran's decisions to remove all limits on uranium enrichment; the recent attacks, in the past few days, on protesters on the streets of Tehran; the detention, as has been mentioned, of our excellent ambassador, Rob Macaire; and, of course, the unforgivable shooting down of the Ukrainian airliner, killing 176 innocent civilians, including four Britons, all of whose deaths we mourn today.

These are sure signs not only that the hardliners in Tehran are firmly back in the ascendancy in the Iranian regime, but that their actions are out of control. Nothing

and no one can excuse those acts of violence. Like all of us, I fear not just for the Iranian people and the stability of the region, but especially for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other dual nationals who are languishing in Iranian jails. I hope that the Foreign Secretary can comment on their current health and safety. Like him, I will be raising those concerns when I meet the Iranian ambassador to London tomorrow.

The question we must all ask, and which I ask the Foreign Secretary today, is: where do we go from here? Ever since Donald Trump started to walk away from the Iran nuclear deal, we have been on a path to this point. With the strategy of engagement from the so-called moderates in Iran now discredited and abandoned, and with the hardliners firmly back in charge in Tehran and an equally unpredictable, trigger-happy President in the White House, we are just one more mistake or miscalculation away from brinkmanship tipping over into war. What action is the Foreign Secretary taking to ensure a permanent de-escalation of the tension, rather than an inexorable drift towards war?

**Dominic Raab:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and welcome his condemnation of the conduct of the Government of Iran, including their non-compliance with the JCPOA and their treatment of our ambassador in Tehran. As I have said, it is important to maintain transatlantic unity and solidarity, and this House must also give the regime in Iran a very clear signal that we stand together on these important issues.

As I have said, I raised the issue of dual nationals, including Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, with Foreign Minister Zarif when I spoke to him. They remain at the centre and forefront of our thinking on Iran. We constantly, consistently and at every level raise both their welfare and the need for them to be released without conditions. They should not be held. They should be back home with their families.

The hon. Gentleman asked the obvious exam question: where do we go from here? He is right to say that we need to try to defuse the situation. We have been working with our international partners in Europe, the US and, crucially, in the region, to emphasise the absolute importance of de-escalating the tensions, particularly to avoid military conflagration. That would only benefit Daesh and the other terrorist groups in the region, and I think there is consistency of agreement on that point. There must be accountability where there is wrongdoing, whether that relates to the treatment of foreign nationals or ensuring that the JCPOA is complied with, if the JCPOA is to be a credible means of dealing with the nuclear issue. We must work with all our international partners and show unity of purpose so that, given the political climate in Tehran that the hon. Gentleman described, there is no doubt about the international community's approach to Iran's current behaviour.

Notwithstanding all that, the diplomatic door must be left open, because the only way to de-escalate permanently, which I think was the phrase the hon. Gentleman used, is to find a diplomatic solution to all the issues, from nuclear activity to Iran's destabilising actions in the region and, of course, the dual nationals and the many other bilateral issues. We have been clear and consistent that that choice is there for the Iranian regime to make. It can slip further into isolation, with all the ensuing consequences for the people of Iran, or it

can choose to come through the diplomatic door and sit at the negotiating table, which is the only way that all the issues will be resolved over the long term.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): When Iran faces a fork in the road, it chooses time and again not to take the opportunity to be a responsible member of the international community. Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is not the time to ease that pressure? One practical step that we can take here in the UK would be to proscribe the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organisation, which is exactly what it is.

**Dominic Raab**: My right hon. Friend speaks powerfully about the importance of ensuring that a consistent message is sent not just from London but from all our international partners about the wrongdoing that has been taking place in Iran, and of ensuring some accountability. While maintaining that pressure consistently and with all the means available to us—I am happy to consider his point about proscription—we must also be clear that the choice is Iran's to make, that there is an alternative, and that we are not blindly seeking confrontation: quite the opposite. We seek de-escalation, and we want Iran to live up to the basic norms of the international community, and there is a diplomatic way through to a negotiated solution.

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): I commend the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) for his question and the Foreign Secretary for his answers. There is a great deal of cross-party unity in the House, and he can rest assured of the SNP's support, particularly for efforts towards co-operation in the E3 format, which must be encouraged and promoted. Will he update the House on his discussions with the US authorities, particularly with a view to encouraging dialogue to persuade them to lift their apparently still in force ban on the Iranian Foreign Minister getting to the United Nations for discussions?

**Dominic Raab**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for our diplomatic efforts. I was in Washington last week and had various conversations with the National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Notwithstanding that we do not agree with the US on maximum pressure, for example, the US has always been clear that there is a diplomatic way forward and that the door remains open. President Trump has said that, President Macron has said it, and the Prime Minister has said it. Again, the choice is for Iran to make.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the visa. I understand that it was not refused but, in any event, it is important throughout the process to ensure that we keep open the opportunity for dialogue and a diplomatic path forward to a negotiated solution.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this moment marks the beginning of an opportunity, if Iran wishes to take it, for Iran to co-operate with the international community on the downing of the Ukraine International Airlines aircraft? Several nationalities were involved, including, unfortunately, a number of Britons and, indeed, many more Iranians. Will my right hon. Friend

therefore tell the House precisely what discussions have been had about a proper international investigation into the downing of the aircraft, including the handing over of the flight recorders to proper international investigators?

**Dominic Raab**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In fact, I was speaking with my Canadian counterpart in Montreal on Thursday. The Canadians suffered an appalling loss of life, and they are leading some work on visas and the repatriation of bodies. We are working together with them, all those affected and, indeed, our wider partners to ensure a credible, full and transparent investigation, because although we understand that Iran has accepted responsibility, we still do not know why the incident happened and all the details of how it happened. For the British victims, the Canadian victims, the Ukrainian victims and, above all, the Iranian victims, we deserve to know the answers to the questions and the truth behind why this appalling avoidable tragedy happened.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I have previously raised with Ministers in the House the harassment of BBC Persian staff and their families by the Iranian regime. I understand the regime is now citing BBC Persian Television's alleged encouragement of unrest and violence in Iran as justification for further bullying. What is the Foreign Secretary doing to support the staff who work in this field, and their families in Iran, to make sure they are safe and secure?

**Dominic Raab**: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work in this regard. It is important we send a clear message that BBC journalists—any journalists, and specifically British journalists—cannot be bullied in this way any more than our diplomatic staff. In fact, when I was in Canada with my Canadian opposite number, we launched a new award for those who champion and protect media freedom. Not only are we looking at this individual case, but there is an international campaign to make sure that we provide protection for journalists around the world who, in very difficult circumstances, are willing to speak truth to power.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend work closely with Ministers from the other countries that lost citizens on Ukraine International Airlines flight 752? Will he perhaps attend the joint investigation group meeting in London on Thursday, which will be attended by the Ukrainian Foreign Minister? Does he agree it is essential that Iran not only allows full investigation of what happened but organises the repatriation of the bodies and pays full compensation to the families of those who were lost?

**Dominic Raab**: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course we will be fully plugged in and, indeed, a driving force in the international effort to make sure we get the right answers in terms of the investigation. This point is even stronger now that the Government of Iran have accepted at least a measure of responsibility, but it is crucial that the investigation is fully independent and has an international component so that people can feel confidence in the outcome and the answers. We will work with all our international partners on all the issues

[*Dominic Raab*]

he raises, and I certainly want to see justice for the incredible number of people who are still mourning and grieving this terrible loss.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Foreign Secretary will have seen reports of the demonstrations across Iran this weekend, illustrating the profound and widespread unhappiness among the people of Iran about the recent actions of their Government. That may in itself be the start of an opportunity to see a shift in Iran's foreign policy, but if we are to maximise that opportunity, we need to engage those interlocutors in the Gulf and the wider middle east with whom we have good relations in order to see that shift executed in Iran.

**Dominic Raab:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that watching the change in the public mood in Tehran and more broadly in Iran is very striking. He is also right to say that we need to work with all our partners. In fact, I would go further and say that, beyond our partners in the middle east, we also need to work with China, Russia and those closest to them to enhance and reinforce the solidarity and clarity of the message that we are sending to the regime in Tehran.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The malign influence of the IRGC extends from the strait of Hormuz through Lebanon, Gaza and Yemen and almost anywhere, and now into Europe. Is it not time that we sent a very strong signal by proscribing the IRGC, freezing its assets and saying, "We will give you an opportunity to unfreeze them once you restore proper, normal diplomatic actions and behaviours across the world"?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend makes a strong point about the pernicious behaviour of not just the IGRC but the Quds force, of which General Soleimani was the head. The Quds force is the element, the component or the wing of the regime that is responsible for working with the militias, the proxies and the terrorist groups from Lebanon through to Iraq and Syria. It is absolutely right to make that point. On proscription more generally, they are subject to sanctions, but we will obviously keep the issue under very careful review.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): There is now a real sense of chaos, emergency and crisis in the region. What assessment has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office made of the increased risk from IS/Daesh, both in the region and here at home? What actions are being taken to counter any dangers?

**Dominic Raab:** The hon. Lady makes an important point. The reality is that unless we can pursue a path to de-escalation, the risk of war would benefit the terrorist groups, particularly Daesh. We are keeping the risk assessment under constant review, although we do not talk about the operational side of that. One clear aspect of all this that we have in common, whether with our European partners and our American partners or with the Iranian Government, is the desire not to allow the hard-fought and hard-won gains against Daesh to be reversed. We are working with all our partners in the middle east to make sure that we do not lose the gains

that we made, or indeed allow the actions and tensions in the middle east to fuel the fire of Daesh and other terrorist groups.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): The Foreign Secretary will have seen pictures of the Israeli flag being tied to the British flag and both being set alight. That hardly speaks of de-escalation. How is the attempt at de-escalation working throughout the region? What particular factors are being taken into account to protect Israel?

**Dominic Raab:** We work closely with all our international partners and we are engaged with Israel on the issues that we have in common with it. On de-escalation so far, after the death of General Soleimani we saw an Iranian response that was dangerous and reckless, but none the less we have not seen any major military intervention from Iran since then. Our message to all sides in the region is that we need to take baby steps towards de-escalating over time, and then, gradually, as the situation defuses, think about what positive measures can be put in place to build up confidence in the region. Until we get on that train and on that track, it is difficult to see how the wider diplomatic initiatives can bear fruit.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that although any sensible person does not want the pressure on Iran to cease, nobody sensible wants another war in the middle east, either? He mentioned the door being slightly open; is it not a fact that if we want peace, we have to carry on speaking to the Iranians? All of us who have been campaigning for the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and the other prisoners believe that perhaps speaking at a level of faith, with an all-faith delegation going to Iran to speak to the faith leaders there, might help. I spoke to the Archbishop of Canterbury at a service only this time last week, and he seems to think that if the delegation was welcome—if Iran was open to a delegation—it could take place. Would the Secretary of State support such a delegation to visit Iran?

**Dominic Raab:** I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's premise: we need to keep the diplomatic lines of communication open. I have made it clear to Foreign Minister Zarif that for our part we wish to do that and to start to see how measures can be taken on all aspects, but particularly to see the Iranians come back to full compliance with the JCPOA. I sympathise very much with the spirit of the idea of an all-faith diplomatic initiative. The hon. Gentleman he will have seen that for the moment, through our Foreign Office travel advice, we advise against travel to Iran. That is probably the safest bet for the moment.

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) for asking this urgent question and to the Secretary of State for his response.

The tensions in the region are clearly incredibly high at the moment, but one of the best ways for the Iranians to help would be for them to recommit to their 2015 commitments to the nuclear deal. What practical steps can the Government take to ensure that they can roll back from the position they are in now and de-escalate the situation?

**Dominic Raab:** We are looking very carefully at this. As someone said from the Opposition Benches, it is about balance. On the one hand, we need to have some accountability for the systematic non-compliance, which well predates the death of General Soleimani; on the other hand, we want to make sure it is very clear that there is always a diplomatic route back. We are looking at it very carefully. One reason why I was in Paris yesterday evening was to make sure that we are co-ordinating and engaging closely with our E3 partners as well as our American friends.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Given that the shooting down of flight 752 is, sadly, the latest instance of civilian airliners being shot down in regions of conflict apparently by mistake, may I urge the Foreign Secretary, with colleagues, to see what more might be done to enable defence forces properly to distinguish between civilian aircraft and potential military threats in order to ensure that such deaths are avoided in future?

**Dominic Raab:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. That is incredibly important. It is not clear to me whether that is what caused the shooting down of the Ukrainian airliner in this case, but I am very willing to hear his points on that and on any initiative related to it.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I welcome the efforts of my right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in going to Amman this weekend to express condolences for the death of our partner and friend Sultan Qaboos. Does he agree that, reaching out through friends in the region, particularly Qatar, Kuwait and, of course, the new Sultan Haitham in Oman, would be a good avenue for making sure that Iran not only comes back into the fold and frees its people from this awful tyranny, but perhaps gives up the policy of hostage-taking that has taken not just Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe away from her daughter, but many, many others from their families, too?

**Dominic Raab:** Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the Sultan of Oman for his incredible track record of service to his country, and we look forward to working with the new Sultan and the Government of Oman on all those issues. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to condemn the taking of dual nationals into detention. The taking of Nazanin and of all the UK dual nationals is groundless. Their treatment has been well below the standards that we would expect. Fundamentally, they should all be released without condition. This is part of the pattern of unlawful behaviour that Iran needs to correct if it wants to come in from the international cold.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): In his conversations with his Iranian counterparts about the detention of the UK ambassador, what assurances has the Secretary of State sought about the rights of other peaceful protesters across Iran who do not have the luxury of diplomatic immunity to protect them?

**Dominic Raab:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She raises a very important point. The reality is that the international norms that reflect, recognise and call for the safeguarding of peaceful protest apply across the board. We do make those points to our Iranian partners,

but, of course, there is a very clear obligation under the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations about the way that ambassadors and diplomatic staff are treated. This is crucial, not least because if we cannot have confidence that our diplomatic staff and missions are respected, we cannot engage in the kind of diplomacy that we need to charter a peaceful way forward.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Sir Iain Duncan Smith. [*Interruption.*] Sir Iain?

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Sorry, I did not hear you, Mr Speaker. I will not give up that opportunity.

First, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) on securing this urgent question, and my right hon. Friend at the Dispatch Box on his calm and reassuring manner throughout this period? Notwithstanding that, I would like to ask a question. From the moment that we negotiated that deal and the west offered an olive branch to Iran, our expectations have never really been met. Iran shows the face that it wishes to show to the west, but underneath it, it has gone on not de-escalating, but escalating the violence. Whether it is in Syria, all the way down to the Houthis, it has done nothing else but use its money to provoke violence and escalate trouble and war. My question to my right hon. Friend is this: at which point do we really get the idea that this regime is not displaying a peaceful nature and is not going to give up on any of its opportunities and that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, like many others, is being held as a hostage? When do we decide that, actually, the people of Iran do not want this organisation any more and that we want to support them?

**Dominic Raab:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He makes a range of important points. The reality is that we still view the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as the best means of restraining those in the regime who wish to pursue a nuclear weapon, and that is a top priority—our overriding priority—for this Government. In relation to the wider nefarious conduct of the Government of Iran, I share all of his concerns and then some. The reality is that that is why we have always supported the Macron and Trump initiatives to try to bring Iran back to the diplomatic table and deal with all of those issues in the round—if there is a choice to be made by the regime. We will continue to hold Iran accountable for its actions, while leaving the diplomatic door ajar. Ultimately, this will have to be resolved through a negotiated diplomatic route. Who knows what will happen given the current constellation of factors and the change of circumstances in Iran, but, at some point, it will have to come to the negotiating table.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Given the parallels between the ruthless and reckless behaviour of Iran, and the way in which the late and unlamented Soviet Union used to behave, does the Foreign Secretary accept that a policy of long-term containment, as worked in the one case, is probably most likely to work in the other? If he does accept that, is he satisfied that our American allies are now communicating with us to the extent that they need to so that our troops, who are their partners, are not unduly affected by sudden, dramatic initiatives without warning?

**Dominic Raab:** My right hon. Friend makes a series of important points, including about close consultation with our American partners. Of course, I discuss these issues regularly with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. I am not entirely sure that the analogy with the Soviet Union is quite right. There is at least the semblance of regular elections in Iran.

**Dr Lewis:** There was in the Soviet Union.

**Dominic Raab:** In fairness, not on the same level as in Iran. I think the question is the balance between containing the nefarious behaviour and ensuring—while holding Iran to account in the way in which my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members have mentioned—that there is still a route back to the negotiating table, and that is what we are seeking to pursue.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** I concur with my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis); I also believe that Iran is the Soviet Union of the middle east, given what it does and the extent of its reach. My question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is simply this: the United Kingdom and the allies supported dissidents and pro-democracy protesters in the Soviet Union at that time, so what are we doing specifically to support democracy protesters and dissidents in Iran?

**Dominic Raab:** We make it clear in international forums—we have done so in the UN, for example—that we support the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression in Iran. My right hon. Friend will know of the already febrile state in Tehran, which would point to interference in domestic affairs and attempts to usurp the regime. We track a careful balance between standing up for the norms, values and human rights that he and I share, and ensuring that we do not play into the hands of the hardliners. Ultimately, we want Tehran to make the choice to take responsibility for its actions, and we have seen at least a semblance of that with its acknowledgment that it was responsible for the downing of the airliner. We then want the country to take it a step further by reversing the path towards political and economic isolation, and that will only happen if Iran comes back to the negotiating table through the diplomatic channel.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** May I commend what the Secretary of State said about Sultan Qaboos, and indeed what my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat)—the other former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee—said about the potential role of Oman in the future? During this crisis, it was the Iranian Supreme Leader who talked about the corrupting influence of American troops stationed in the region, but what has been revealed over the past few days is the corrupting influence of the IRG on Iran itself. It is holding in place a regime that is frankly illegitimate, as we have seen through the eyes of the demonstrators on the streets against it. Will we continue to de-escalate the violence, and to escalate the competition of values in which most Iranian people are on our side?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We can see the anger in Tehran and more generally about this state of affairs, which is why the transparency

in relation to the downing of the airliner is so important—not just for the British individuals who lost their lives or the wider international victims, but also for the people of Iran, who were the biggest victims when that airliner went down. We need to ensure that there is transparency and answers to questions for all the reasons that my hon. Friend outlined.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** Might my right hon. Friend, and his colleagues in the G7 and other countries, consider looking at freezing the assets of the children and families of ayatollahs and Government Ministers in Iran who put so much—billions of dollars—into the west? Could we not take some action in that regard?

**Dominic Raab:** One of the things that we are doing and on which we will be collaborating with our international partners—indeed, I spoke to the US and the Canadians about this—is shortly introducing a new sanctions regime, following the Sergei Magnitsky model, which makes sure, as we leave the EU, that we have an autonomous sanctions regime that can impose asset freezes and visa bans for those responsible for gross human rights abuses.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** May I thank my right hon. Friend for his continual calls for de-escalation, for his support for the families of the victims of the aircraft, and for his standing up for British diplomats around the world? Given that the situation would be so much more challenging were Iran to have nuclear weapons, may I also thank him for his work with France and Germany to reboot the JCPOA? Given that Brexit will happen at the end of this month, can he confirm how he sees that relationship with the E3 continuing post 1 February?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right on the various points that she made. She poses a good question, but we are absolutely clear: we are leaving the EU; we are not leaving Europe. This is a good example of where we can engage just as intensively, if not more so, with our E3 partners. I know, having spoken to my French and German opposite numbers, and indeed to Josep Borrell, that that feeling is shared on all sides. So we plan to regularise the meetings that we have on the issue of Iran but also on the wider range of foreign policy challenges that we all share.

**Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend assure the House as to the assistance that is being given to the families of the victims of the Ukrainian International Airlines flight and give an assurance that the Government are doing all they possibly can to help and assist them?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our hearts go out to anyone who has come into this new year and has to face up to the loss of life of a close friend or member of their family. We are doing everything that we can, working with our international partners, to be able to repatriate the victims so that the families can have that solace of paying their last respects. We are also making sure that we work more generally to get an independent investigation with credibility, transparency and an international component so that those families get the answers to the questions that they must be going over in their heads over and over again.

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Following up on the point made by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who is no longer in his place, is there a case for the Foreign Office to do some useful and valuable work on updating the Geneva conventions or, working with others, updating the rules around civilian airliners to do more to ensure that civilian airliners are not, on a semi-regular basis, being shot out of the sky using, often very improperly, poorly made Russian kit? We have had hundreds of people killed, including Britons but also from many other countries, in the past few years.

**Dominic Raab:** I thank my hon. Friend, but the reality is that this not about a lack of clarity around the law. Targeting a civilian airliner is clearly unlawful. There is no absence or lack of legal basis for making that point; the question is compliance. The first thing we need, which is having Iran acknowledge responsibility for this, is to get the full details—the full facts—of how it could have happened. If it is being suggested that it is a mistake, we need to know how a mistake like that could have happened and then learn the appropriate lessons from it. That is what we are absolutely committed to.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): The demonstrations on the streets of Tehran in which the British ambassador was inadvertently caught up follow a large amount of similar activity across the country towards the end of last year when several hundred Iranians lost their lives. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that when considering with his international colleagues the proper response to the events of last week, he and they will be mindful of the fact that large numbers of the Iranian people deplore the actions of the regime under which they live and want nothing more than freedom and the facility to live in peace with their neighbours?

**Dominic Raab:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course the aftermath, with the scenes that we are seeing playing out in Tehran, is testament to that. What is important is that we allow the transparency for people to come to apply the pressure that they need to

apply on the regime to change its course and to adopt a course that will lead the Government out of political and economic isolation. The first and foremost beneficiaries of that will be the people of Iran.

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that an extremely serious issue we now face is the safety of our armed forces, who have been described quite disgracefully by a senior commander in the Quds force as potentially “collateral damage” in attacks on the US military?

**Dominic Raab:** Yes, and it is good to see my hon. Friend in his place. I remember competing with him in an open primary in Esher back in 2009; I think I have aged more than he has over the last nine years in the last week. He is absolutely right. Crucially, our first priority is to ensure that UK personnel in the region are safe and that our diplomats are safe. We have changed our travel advice, because we need to protect the safety of our wider citizens too.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): There has been a pattern of misinformation campaigns coming from Iran to seek to subvert the extent of its actions in the past. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the conflicting accounts that have come out of Tehran about this and other recent incidents?

**Dominic Raab:** The short and honest answer is that it is difficult to tell, but my hon. Friend asks the right question. There is clearly a range of different views, not only in Iranian society but in the Government and, indeed, around the senior leadership. As I said at the outset, there is clearly a choice, and I think Iranians are conscious of it: do they continue to contravene the basic principles of international law and the basic tenets that we expect respectable members of the international community to live up to, or do they take the path out of economic and political isolation, which would be in the best interests of the people of Iran, let alone the region and, indeed, the international community?

## Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** I want to make a quick statement to remind Members who may not be aware that, when a Member visits another Member's constituency, except on a purely private visit, they should take reasonable steps in advance to tell the Member in whose constituency the visit is taking place. The guidance also states that "failing to do so is regarded by colleagues as very discourteous." I have had examples from both sides of the House. I just want to remind everybody that we ought to ensure that we give notice.

## Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, 19 December 2019).*

*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 in the World

4.17 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab):** On 12 December, the British people had their say. They delivered a clear majority for this Government and a mandate to take Britain forward. That mandate, set out in the Queen's Speech, marks a bold new chapter for our country, ambitious, self-confident and global in its international outlook. We are leaving the EU in 18 days' time, but we vow to be the strongest of European neighbours and allies. We are taking back control of our laws, but we are also expanding our global horizons to grasp the enormous opportunities of free trade. While we will always serve the interests of the small businesses and the citizens of this country, we will also look to reinforce our national mission as a force for good in the world.

The UK will leave the EU at the end of this month because the House passed the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill's Third Reading with a majority of 99, which is the strongest signal to the EU and the world about our ambition and resolve as we chart the course ahead. That clarity of purpose now gives us the opportunity to be masters of our destiny and chart our course independently but working very closely with our international partners. We will strive with our European friends to secure the best possible arrangements for our future relationship by the end of 2020—a new relationship that honours the will of the people in the 2016 referendum but cherishes the co-operation we have in trade, security and all the other fields with our European friends.

As we enter this decade of renewal, the Government will engage in a thorough and careful review of the United Kingdom's place in the world, including through the integrated security, defence and foreign policy review. It is an opportunity for us to reassess the ways in which we engage on the global stage, including in defence, diplomacy and our approach to development, to ensure that we have a fully integrated strategy. As we conduct that review, our guiding lights will remain the values of free trade, democracy, human rights and the international rule of law.

**Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC):** This is a very wide-ranging review. I think everybody would agree with that. How is the Foreign Secretary going to ensure that there is sufficient parliamentary scrutiny of the review as it is undertaken?

**Dominic Raab:** We will look at all the mechanisms—whether debates in this Chamber, or the operation and scrutiny of the Select Committees—and, indeed, we already welcome the input of individual MPs, caucuses and Select Committees in the normal way. We will make sure that there is proper scrutiny and that we can bring as many people together as possible in charting the course for the UK as we go forward.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend not agree with me that there have been many security and defence reviews over the years and they have all been hampered by one thing in particular, which is that they happened at precisely the same moment as a comprehensive spending review? I very much welcome his announcement of this very extensive review—it is the right time to do it—but does he not agree that it must be done independently of the Treasury? We must decide what Britain is for and what assets we need to achieve that, and then only subsequently—a year later—should the Treasury become involved.

**Dominic Raab:** I am not sure it is likely to work exactly as my hon. Friend suggests, but I do take his point. We need to be very clear in our minds about the strategy we are charting and then reconcile our means, including our financial means, to those ends, so he makes an important point.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): In support of what my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) has said, may I remind the Foreign Secretary that, in 2017-18, we had a national security capability review that sought to look at both security and defence together, but it was so limited by having to be financially or fiscally neutral that it meant that extra resources for, for example, cyber-warfare would be granted only at the cost of making cuts in, for example, the Royal Marines? That is no way to conduct a review—to play off one necessary part, say security, against another necessary part, such as defence.

**Dominic Raab:** I think my right hon. Friend makes an important point, although at the same time we need to be mindful of the overarching financial parameters that any Government—any responsible Government—are going to be within if we are to make credible investment decisions. Certainly, on the issue of cyber and its being somehow nudged out of focus or set up as a zero-sum game with troops, I can assure him that that will not be the case. Cyber increasingly plays an important role not just in our security, but in our ability to project our foreign policy.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Dominic Raab:** I will give way one more time and then make some progress.

**Crispin Blunt:** This is on the same theme. It is my right hon. Friend's Department that has suffered the worst cuts over the last period because it has been an unprotected Department. What we must do if we are to direct defence, development and the intelligent services in the right direction is to have the capacity within his Department to do that. Will he ensure that he

fights very hard for the necessary resources to be able to recreate the capacity of a Rolls-Royce Department of State?

**Dominic Raab:** Quite right, and I welcome my hon. Friend's support as I make those overtures to the Treasury.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Dominic Raab:** Of course, and I am sure the hon. Lady is going to be supporting the Foreign Office in the next spending review.

**Catherine West:** I will, indeed, given that a comparison across all Departments shows that the Foreign Office has been cut back at least as badly as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. May I urge, in any review of finance, that we look carefully at the ability for human rights to be at the forefront of what the Foreign Office does? Traditionally, that has been strong; it is less so now.

**Dominic Raab:** I thank the hon. Lady and I think, given what I am about to say, that I will be able to give her the kind of reassurance she needs. I look forward to working with her in the weeks and months ahead to make sure that we never lose sight of our values, and human rights is a key component of that.

We will strengthen our historical trading ties as we leave the EU, while boosting British competitiveness by tapping wider global markets. We want strong trade with our existing EU partners. They are important and valuable to us as a market; I do not think anyone doubts that. At the same time, we are making good progress in paving the way for our first round of future free trade agreements with the rest of the world. When I was out in the US, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told me in Washington that the US is poised

“at the doorstep, pen in hand”,

ready to sign a deal. A free trade deal with the US would boost businesses, create jobs, reduce the cost of living and expand consumer choice on both sides of the Atlantic, so there is a huge opportunity for a win-win deal.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Dominic Raab:** I want to make some progress but will be happy to take an intervention from the hon. Gentleman shortly.

It is also at the same time important that we broaden our horizons to embrace the huge opportunities in the rising economies of the future from Asia to Latin America, and set out our stall as a global champion of free trade not just bilaterally but in the WTO as well.

Of course, a truly global Britain is about more than just trade and investment, important though those things are for our prosperity and the quality of life we have in this country; global Britain is also about continuing to uphold our values of liberal democracy and our heartfelt commitment to the international rule of law—values for which we are respected the world over.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that nowhere in the world at the moment are these values under greater attack than in Hong Kong, and will he join me in condemning the refusal of the Hong Kong authorities to allow the director of Human Rights Watch entry at the weekend?

**Dominic Raab:** I do join with the right hon. Gentleman in making the following point. The international principles and norms and the rule of law in relation to freedom of peaceful protest and freedom of expression apply as a matter of customary international law; it also applies directly because of the joint Sino-UK declaration in relation to Hong Kong. Of course we want China as a leading member of the international community to live up to those responsibilities, and the case the right hon. Gentleman highlights is a very good example of that.

We will continue to be standing up for those values. We will continue to be a leading member of NATO, ensuring that that alliance can rise to the new challenges ahead. We will hold Iran accountable for its destabilising and dangerous actions in the region, but we will also, as we made clear in the response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) earlier, encourage it to de-escalate and to seek a path to an alternative future through diplomatic dialogue.

We will call out those who flout international law, like the Russian Government, from its illegal annexation in Crimea and its chemical weapons attack in Salisbury to its cyber-attacks and its propensity for spreading fake news.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** On Russia, and indeed to go back to what the Foreign Secretary said on the US, the United States has been vocal in its opposition to Nord Stream 2, correctly in my view, and the United Kingdom Government have taken the view that it has little to nothing to do with the United Kingdom. Can he assure me that that will be looked at properly in the integrated review he mentions, because it very much is in our interests that Nord Stream 2 does not go ahead?

**Dominic Raab:** I take the point the hon. Gentleman made, and he made it eloquently. We will consider all those issues as part of the review, and it is important that we get the right balance; that is the most I will say for the moment.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Dominic Raab:** Let me make a little progress as I have been generous, but I will be happy to give way again in the future.

We will call out those who flout international law. We will live up to our responsibilities, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) asked, in relation to the people of Hong Kong. That means supporting their right to peaceful protest and encouraging dialogue on all sides within the one country, two systems framework that China itself has consistently advocated since the Sino-British joint declaration in 1984, a treaty which has and holds international obligations on all sides.

We will use our moral compass to champion the causes that know no borders. This year we have the opportunity—and the honour and privilege—to host the UN climate change summit COP26 in Glasgow, and that is the UK's chance to demonstrate global leadership on climate change. Under the Conservatives, we are the first country to legislate to end our contribution to global warming, and this Government know that we must leave the environment in a better state for our children.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for referring to the emergency that is climate change and legislation to bring about a net-zero economy, but legislation is not enough; we need to see actual implementation. Does he agree that the UK has much more to do to deliver on a green industrial revolution, which means that we can continue to be an industrial nation while having a net-zero economy, before 2050?

**Dominic Raab:** I agree with all of those things and pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the way in which she articulated her intervention. We need to make sure we have the legislation in place, we need to work with our international partners, and we will harness the British expertise—the technology, the innovation and the entrepreneurialism that this country is so great at—to find the creative solutions so that we leave our precious environment in a better state for the next generation.

The Government are also proud to maintain our commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on international development. We want to support developing countries, so that they can stand on their own two feet. We are helping them to strengthen their economies, make peace and forge security arrangements that are sustainable, so that their people are healthier and have a better standard of living.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): In highlighting the importance of our 0.7% commitment with regard to international development, does the Foreign Secretary agree that, as in our manifesto, one of the most effective ways we can spend that money is to ensure that every girl in the world gets 12 years of quality education?

**Dominic Raab:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to say a little bit more about that, because it is one of the crucial campaigns we are taking forward. We should not be so shy about the incredible work we are doing. We are proud of our role in working to eliminate preventable deaths and overcome diseases such as Ebola and malaria. We will be there for those who need our help most in their hour of need, as we demonstrated with our world-leading humanitarian response capability, which was put into action in the Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian. Being a force for good in the world also means championing basic human rights. Coming on to the point raised by my hon. Friend, we are leading global action to help to provide 12 years of quality education for all girls by 2030 so that no girl is left behind, all their potential is tapped, and they can realise their ambitions individually and for their countries.

We are also proud to continue, with our Canadian partners, our work to defend media freedoms. I was in Montreal last week to talk about that with my Canadian opposite number. Led by our two countries, we are

working with partners around the world to create legislative protections for journalists; support individual journalists who find themselves at risk; and increase accountability for those who threaten journalists whose work shines a light on conflicts and tyranny around the world. We are dedicated to shielding those with the courage to speak truth to power. On that note, I will give way to the SNP.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I am extremely grateful to the Foreign Secretary for that attempt at humour. *[Laughter.]* I thank the Foreign Secretary for what he has just said. He is entirely correct. Will he do everything in his power—this was the subject of the first debate I ever had as a Member of this House five years ago—to secure the release of the jailed Saudi writer Raif Badawi?

**Dominic Raab:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. The important thing, when we are dealing with Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and all those partners with whom we have, let us say, difficult issues to address—Saudi, of course, is a very close partner—is that we are always, particularly with the closer relationships we have, such as with Saudi and other middle eastern partners, willing and able to speak very candidly. I have raised human rights issues with my Saudi opposite number and will continue to do so, including in relation to cases such as the one the hon. Gentleman highlights.

**Mr Steve Baker:** My right hon. Friend will know that for people like me who represent diverse diaspora communities, the internal and external affairs of other countries often raise issues of the most acute local importance. I do not want to draw him on to Kashmir today, but will he, in the course of his reviews, consider how foreign policy might be made more democratically accountable? The reality, particularly when foreign policy survives between Governments of successive parties, is that it does not actually survive contact with the electorates in constituencies like mine. I wonder whether foreign policy might somehow be more responsive to what voters think when they are from those diaspora communities.

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If Brexit was in part a reaction by the British people to having decisions imposed on them, I think there is a wider lesson in foreign policy that we are there to serve our citizens, including communities such as those that are very powerful and contribute a huge amount in Wycombe. More generally, we can see that with consular cases, for example the recent case in Cyprus, the Ukrainian airliner case and others where we represent individual citizens who have suffered or lost lives. There needs to be a sensitivity to individual citizens, whether they are the victims or the communities more broadly, and a strong sense that the Foreign Office is not just on a different level but is acting and serving for them.

I would just like to take this opportunity to pay a huge tribute to the consular department in the Foreign Office, which day in, day out is serving the interests of British families, British victims and British nationals. It rarely gets the credit that is due to it, but it does a superb job. I have seen that in my six months as Foreign Secretary and I am very proud of the work they do.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's commitment on human rights and I thank him for the fantastic work he has

done—I remember serving with him on the Joint Committee on Human Rights many years ago when we first came to Parliament. Will he confirm that freedom of religion or belief will always be a key priority for the United Kingdom? Eighty per cent. of individuals around the world identify themselves as of one faith or another, and our Government have a strong track record of standing up for freedom of religion or belief. They commissioned the Truro review, and 10 out of its 22 recommendations have been taken forward. Will he confirm that that will always be a key priority? I thank him and his Ministers for their support.

**Dominic Raab:** I thank my hon. Friend and pay tribute to him for his extraordinary work and dedication to implementing the Truro conclusions. I confirm that we absolutely want to protect not just individual freedom of expression, but the rights of religious groups as well as the right for people to exercise their faith and conscience. One of the issues that I discussed with Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne in Canada on Thursday was a new global award for media freedoms that we have announced to recognise those who defend journalists and keep the flame of freedom alive in the darkest corners of the world. That is not just because we want to protect them individually, but because transparency and getting the stories out and holding regimes, and often, non-Government actors to account can happen only if we get the facts. Journalists do an incredibly brave job in getting those facts into the public domain.

Once we have left the EU and regained control of our sanctions rules, the Government will implement the Magnitsky provisions of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. That will give us a powerful new tool to hold the perpetrators of the worst human rights abuses to account.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Dominic Raab:** I will, for the last time.

**Bob Blackman:** In the Conservative manifesto, three conflict zones were specifically mentioned: Israel and the middle east, Sri Lanka and Cyprus. Will my right hon. Friend give us a further illustration of what action the Foreign Office will take in those three regions to help to end those conflicts and bring perpetrators of war crimes to justice?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is right: those three areas remain a priority. There is a huge amount of diplomatic work. We talk to our international partners, including not only our traditional partners—the Europeans, Americans and Canadians—but those in the regions of the different conflicts, about not just the importance of getting peace, but the kind of reconciliation that can come only with some accountability for the worst human rights abuses. Bringing into effect the Magnitsky regime is our opportunity to build and reinforce that at home.

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way one more time?

**Dominic Raab:** For my hon. Friend, I will—one more time.

**Mr Vara:** I am most grateful. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that one of the United Kingdom's assets is the diversity of its population? For example, within the UK, we have some 1.5 million people of Indian origin, who provide a living bridge in terms of our contact and help to strengthen our relationship with India. Likewise, there are other communities here who provide a strong link with other countries. Does he agree that as we seek to strengthen our role on the global stage, that can only help us?

**Dominic Raab:** I entirely agree. The Indian community make an incredible contribution and help us to sell UK plc abroad not just in India, but around the world, as do many other communities. The point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) is that we need to not just respect and safeguard the interests of those communities, but be proud of them and enable and empower them to champion the UK on our behalf. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) makes an excellent point.

From our brave armed forces serving on the frontline to the diplomats nurturing our relations with nations around the world, and the aid workers providing life-saving support to those who need it most, British foreign policy will of course serve the citizens of this country, but we are also proud of our ability to make a difference to the poorest, the oppressed and the most vulnerable around the world. We will continue that effort every day of every week, because that is our calling as a country and that is the mission of this Conservative Government.

4.39 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I start by welcoming my new Front-Bench colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), who brings a wealth of experience and passion on foreign policy issues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), who has been a thorn in the side of the Government over unlawful arms sales. He is now even closer to the Mace—should the urge ever take him again.

I am, however, deeply sorry to lose from the Front Bench and our Parliament our good friends Helen Goodman and Liz McInnes. They were both fabulous constituency MPs and very well liked Members of the House, and their contributions on foreign policy from this Dispatch Box and in Westminster Hall were always constructive but forceful. Whether it was Helen's brilliant work in forcing the Government to introduce the Magnitsky sanctions or her campaigning for the Uighurs in China or Liz's passionate efforts to draw attention to the plight of civilians being attacked by their own Governments in Cameroon and Sudan, they both made a great contribution to the public discourse and will be sadly missed from those debates.

On a personal note, may I also say how delighted I am to be facing the Foreign Secretary today? In the national hunt season, it is apt to say that both of us got away quickly in our respective party leadership stakes. I joined him in making it over the first fence. I hope that, unlike him, I do not fall at the second, but I do hope that whoever wins, the outcome on our side will be better for the country than the outcome on his. I found myself at the weekend looking through some of my old exchanges with the Prime Minister at this Dispatch Box

when he was Foreign Secretary and thinking about the chance of taking him on in the future. I want to read to the House one of the responses he gave to me in March 2017 when I asked our future Prime Minister about the Trump Administration's reported desire to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement. I say this just to reassure every Member, especially the newer ones on both sides, that our country is in the safest of hands and in the care of the most insightful of minds. This is what he said in response to my concerns about Donald Trump, the Paris agreement and other issues:

“With great respect, I must say that I think the right hon. Lady is again being far too pessimistic.... We were told that the JCPOA—the nuclear deal with Iran—

“was going to be junked; it is now pretty clear that America supports it.”—

supports it!—

“We were told that there was going to be a great love-in between the new US Administration and Russia; they are now very much...in line. As for climate change, I think the right hon. Lady is once again being too pessimistic. Let us wait and see. We have heard the mutterings of the right hon. Lady; let us see what the American Administration actually do. I think she will be pleasantly surprised, as she has been, if she were remotely intellectually honest, in all other respects.”—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2017; Vol. 624, c. 116.]

That was the strategic genius who is now in charge of our country, the intellectually honest politician, who, to be honest, clearly has no intellect. After all, as I have just recounted, in the space of just one answer to one question from me, he made four catastrophic and careless misjudgments on foreign policy issues—and that is before we get started on the hopeless faith in Trump's son-in-law to negotiate a middle east peace deal, his horribly reckless treatment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, his craven attempts to champion monsters such as Crown Prince Salman and President Sisi, his disgraceful jokes about clearing dead bodies to make way for golf courses in Libya, his leading role in the unlawful sale of arms for use in Yemen and his shameful inaction on holding Myanmar to account for its genocidal treatment of the Rohingya.

So we now have a Prime Minister in place for the next five years with no heart when it comes to human rights and civilian deaths, no brain when it comes to Donald Trump and the fate of jailed Britons and no courage when it comes to taking on tyrants overseas. When it comes to foreign policy, he is the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion rolled into one, and he hasn't got Dorothy to help him; he just has a pair of Dominics.

**Mr Vara:** As the right hon. Lady is in full flow in criticising colleagues, will she take this opportunity to criticise the present leader of the Labour party for his antisemitism and for presiding over a party that has done very little to rectify the issue? Will she also criticise her leader for his friendship with Hamas and other terrorists who have been directly involved in attacking British citizens?

**Emily Thornberry:** I have made it perfectly clear that it is my belief that our party has not dealt with antisemitism in the way that it should have, but I know my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and he is not antisemitic. I have nothing—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Gentleman will stop heckling me, I will move on to the second half of—

**Mr Vara** rose—

**Emily Thornberry:** I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman again, so he can sit down.

**James Gray:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am a little unclear about the precise ruling on this matter, but a moment or two ago, the right hon. Lady, who speaks from the Front Bench for the Labour party, described the Prime Minister as a cowardly liar. Is that really within the highest standards that we use this House?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I am sure that the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) will know that I was listening very carefully and my interpretation was that, had she said that any Member of this House was a cowardly lion, or words to that effect, I would have stopped her. I have given her the benefit of the doubt, in that she was drawing an allegory from a well-known work of fiction, but it is marginal, and I think she knows that.

**Emily Thornberry:** I was talking about a pair of Dominics, which explains why we are having today's debate on the international aspects of the Queen's Speech, which, Brexit and extradition policy aside, has absolutely nothing new to say on foreign policy, defence or international development, at a time when the world is crying out for new initiatives and global leadership on these issues. At a time when Her Majesty has got quite enough on her plate, I ask all her supporters in the House whether it was really necessary to waste her time asking her to read out the following lines, drafted by Downing Street:

"My Government will honour the Armed Forces Covenant...and the NATO commitment to spend at least two per cent of national income on defence."

Nothing new, no substance behind it—that is a statement that sounds all too hollow to our armed forces families living on substandard salaries in substandard accommodation.

Let me continue:

"As the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, my Government will ensure that it continues to play a leading role in global affairs, defending its interests and promoting its values."

Nothing new, no substance behind it, and it bears no relation to reality when it comes to our role in the world under this Government. Let me continue:

"My Government will be at the forefront of efforts to solve the...complex international security issues."

Nothing new, no substance behind it, and it is at odds with a Government who cannot even explain the strategy for Syria, Libya or Yemen, Iran, Israel or Palestine, let alone the ongoing crisis with Iran.

There is more:

"My Government...will champion global free trade and work alongside international partners to solve the most pressing global challenges."

Waffle, waffle, waffle—nothing new, no substance behind it—[*Interruption.*] Unfortunately, I am quoting Her Majesty, who had those words written for her by the people at No. 10—nothing new, no substance behind any of it, and an insult, when we consider how this Prime Minister actively acquiesced when his friend and hero, Donald Trump, started ducking all those global challenges and actively making them all worse, and told me that I was being pessimistic for warning as much.

Among all those vacuous, meaningless lines that Her Majesty was forced to read out, there is one of greater interest in the foreign policy section of the speech, which I would like to highlight:

"My Government will take steps to protect the integrity of democracy and the electoral system in the United Kingdom."

Let us bear in mind that those words were drafted by Downing Street for our sovereign to read out in front of Parliament. That was a solemn promise from the Government, in Her Majesty's name, to protect the integrity of democracy here in Britain. Yet here we are, still waiting—still waiting!—for the Government to publish the Intelligence and Security Committee's report on Russian interference with our democracy.

Shortly before the election, the Foreign Secretary stood at the Dispatch Box and told us that the delay was perfectly normal because it usually took six weeks for ISC reports to be published, although this report had already been cleared in full by the Committee and the intelligence services, and just needed to be signed off by Downing Street. Most important, of course, it needed to be signed off by the two architects of the leave campaign and renowned friends of Russian oligarchs, the Prime Minister and Dominic Cummings.

Six weeks, the Foreign Secretary told us, but how long has Downing Street now been sitting on the report? I will tell you how long: 12 weeks and five days. Now we are told that it has been cleared for publication, but that can only happen when the new Intelligence and Security Committee is convened. On behalf of the former Chair of the ISC, Dominic Grieve, who is sadly no longer in the House, let me read on to the record his reaction to that news. He said:

"The fact that he"

—the Prime Minister—

"has been able to sanction its publication now shows that in fact it was perfectly possible to sanction its publication before parliament was dissolved...The reasons he gave at the time for non-publication were bogus."

So there we have it: bogus arguments, bogus timetables, bogus excuses, and still no sign of the ISC report. Yet this Government have the barefaced cheek to ask Her Majesty to announce that they are protecting the integrity of our democracy.

In the absence of anything else of substance on foreign affairs in the Queen's Speech, let me raise some of the other issues that were not mentioned, and ask the Minister who winds up the debate to address them. First, may I ask what on earth has happened to the Trump Administration's so-called middle east plan? Has the Foreign Office still not had any sight of that plan? Is there even a plan to look at? Now that he is in a place of greater influence, perhaps the Prime Minister will press ahead with the international summit that he promised to convene as Foreign Secretary, so that we, and our fellow allies with an interest in the middle east, can spell out our red lines on the American plan. Or will he go one better, and use such a summit to demand that if the Trump Administration keep prevaricating, we and others will resume the role of honest broker between Israel and Palestinian that Donald Trump is clearly incapable of fulfilling?

Secondly, talking of honest brokers, may I ask—for what is now the fourth year running since I became shadow Defence Secretary—why the Government are still refusing to use the power vested in them by the

[Emily Thornberry]

United Nations to draft a Security Council resolution demanding an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen, to be observed by all parties? Yemen has just started its second year at the top of the International Rescue Committee's rankings for the world's worst humanitarian crisis. How many more years do its people need to suffer before the Government finally pull their finger out and do their job at the United Nations?

Thirdly—this is a related matter—it is now more than 15 months since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Last month, we saw the horrific spectacle in Riyadh of four junior Saudi operatives being sentenced to execution while all Bin Salman's most senior aides were cleared of all charges. The Government have consistently asked us to have confidence that justice will be done by the Saudi authorities. Well, that was not justice. So I ask the Government, yet again, when they will publish their own assessment of who was responsible for ordering and carrying out the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and when they will deliver the “serious consequences” that were promised from the Dispatch Box

Fourthly, it was distressing last week to read the report of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact into the Foreign Office's prevention of sexual violence initiative, which was intended to tackle the global use of rape as a weapon of war. We welcomed that initiative at the time, but we now read in the commission's report that “ministerial interest waned” after William Hague left the Foreign Office—[*Interruption.*] That is a quote from the report, which goes on to say that “staffing and funding levels dropped precipitously”.

The commitment to the campaign in London fell and a budget of £15 million and 34 staff in 2014 has fallen to £2 million and four workers, including the intern.

**Catherine West:** First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress that she made earlier today.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot just talk the talk? This is about matching the resource to the priority, and sadly, violence against women and girls in areas of conflict does appear to have dropped down the agenda under this Government.

**Emily Thornberry:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and the report confirms that. The budget has been cut, and the group of experts who are supposed to lead overseas support to the victims of sexual violence in war zones has been cut from 70 to 40. This is a damning indictment of a Government who have steadily deprioritised the importance of human rights since the departure of William Hague and who now treat them as an afterthought next to the vital importance of doing trade deals with human rights abusers. [*Interruption.*] If Foreign Office Ministers reject that charge, let them stand up and explain themselves over the downgrading of sexual violence as a priority.

**Dominic Raab:** Wrong.

**Emily Thornberry:** The right hon. Gentleman says that that is wrong. If he would like to get up and explain how it is that the budget has fallen to that extent and how that is not evidence that this is no longer being prioritised, he is welcome to intervene on me right now.

**Dominic Raab:** It is not true. We take issue with the report. There have been a whole series of initiatives to take this forward, and it remains a key priority and agenda item for the Government. We do not accept this, based on either the figures that the right hon. Lady has provided or the level of diplomatic work that has gone in. We will ensure that there is a fuller account, and I can write to her if that would be useful.

**Emily Thornberry:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I would like to know whether it is right that, for example, the number of experts has dropped from 70 to 40. Could he perhaps tell us that? Is it right that the budget has fallen from £15 million to £2 million and that, instead of there being 34 staff, there are only four including an intern? What conclusions can we draw from that? Perhaps we can particularly focus on that, because it seems to be a damning indictment of this Government.

**Dominic Raab:** We have committed £46 million since 2012. Our upcoming international conference in November will bring together countries from around the world to focus on justice and accountability. On that basis alone, to say that this has dropped off the radar is clearly nonsense. We hosted the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict in June 2014. We are the only Government in the world to have a special representative for taking that forward, and the only Government in the world to have a dedicated team and funding focused on tackling conflict-related sexual violence. And because actions matter more than words, our team has completed more than 90 deployments to places from Libya to northern Iraq and the Syrian borders, and we look forward to continuing that crucial work. So I am afraid that the right hon. Lady has again got her facts wrong.

**Emily Thornberry:** It is interesting that, in answering my question, the right hon. Gentleman relies on spending that has happened since 2012. I accept that in 2014 the budget was £15 million and there were 34 staff. My point is that now, in 2020, under this Government, the budget is £2 million and there are four workers, one of whom is an intern. That is the point. We cannot just keep rolling back to previous things. My point is that this started well, but is now trailing off and is no longer a priority. That is an indictment of the current Government. This is what being held to account looks like—[*Interruption.*] The point is what they are doing now, today; that is what is important. They cannot rely on what happened eight years ago.

If I might move on, I have a fifth point, which is on Iran. I echo everything my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) said in response to the urgent question earlier. As he rightly said, the rest of the world cannot sit back and wait and see what happens. As we saw with the disgraceful shooting down of the Ukrainian airliner, we are now only one misdirected missile away from not just further appalling loss of life, but an escalation of violence and brinkmanship that could finally topple all of us into war with a country that is five times the size of Iraq and nine times the size of Syria and that has a population of 83 million people. That cannot be allowed to happen.

Hard as it is, I believe that the UN and the EU need to go back to the drawing board, get all the parties around the table, and discuss how we can revive the

process of engagement, starting with getting the nuclear deal back on track. What actions are the Government taking to that end?

In closing—I will not take any further interventions—I said at the outset that I have been looking at my past debates with the current Prime Minister, and I note that he is to the art of prescience in foreign policy what Basil Fawlty was to customer service. I looked back at our Queen's Speech debate in 2017—I believe it was the only one in which he took part as Foreign Secretary—and what is so depressing is that, just like today, I had to point out that there were no new policy initiatives to discuss: a total vacuum where British global leadership should be; no solutions on Iran, Yemen, Syria, North Korea or Libya; silence on Russia, China, Iraq, Afghanistan and the middle east; and a pathetic paucity of action on climate change.

I closed my speech two and half years ago with words that I will repeat now. Unlike the current Prime Minister, every word I said has been proven utterly true and is just as depressingly relevant today. I said:

“Why is...this Tory Queen's Speech such a blank space with regard to foreign policy?...their sole foreign policy ambition is to stay in lockstep with Donald Trump, whatever hill he chooses to march us up next. That means we are left with a Government who no longer know their own mind on foreign policy because they are beholden to a President who keeps changing his...we could have a Britain that actually has a foreign policy of its own—a Britain ready once again to be a beacon of strength and security, prosperity and values for every country around the world. This Queen's Speech does nothing to advance that. This Government are doing nothing to advance that.—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2017; Vol. 626, cc. 424-25.]

Two and a half years later, as someone once said, absolutely nothing has changed.

5.3 pm

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): I am most grateful to be called so early in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to follow the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), who raised some important issues. I wish her success in the campaign she is about to embark on, and I hope her candidacy lasts a little longer than that of the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), who has just left the Chamber.

It is good to see so many hon. Members in the Chamber for this debate, particularly new Members, a number of whom intend to make their maiden speech during the course of it. They bring expertise and knowledge that I have no doubt will be immensely valuable in our deliberations, and I look forward to hearing their contributions.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary knows, I was an enthusiastic supporter of the Vote Leave campaign. I welcome the emphasis placed by the Queen's Speech on delivering Brexit, which people voted for more than three years ago. I support Brexit not just because I believe in the economic opportunities, but because I believe there is a real role that this country can play in international affairs. We are not little Englanders; we want to look beyond the shores of the European Union. Indeed, many of our greatest opportunities now lie in countries beyond Europe. It is likely within the next 10 years that the five biggest economies in the world will be America, China, Brazil, India and Indonesia. None of them have trade agreements with the European Union, but I hope we will have trade agreements with them as soon as possible within the next decade.

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): The gravity school of economics argues that we always trade more with those closest to us, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the history of the past 200 years suggests the opposite? We have taken beef from Argentina, we have had a closer economic relationship with the United States than with any other single country, and we have incredibly close relationships with India, to which we sold cotton, and with Australia and Canada. Does he agree with me—this is the point he is making—that the gravity school of economics is really rather flawed?

**Mr Whittingdale**: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is short-sighted to look at nearby countries only. Our history shows that we have a tradition of trading right across the globe—I am delighted to have the nod of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade, who is in her place.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I have spent quite a lot of my life serving the country well outside of Europe, and I say in support of what my right hon. Friend says that we still punch well above our weight when we are in Asia or in Africa.

**Mr Whittingdale**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he brings me on to the issue that I wanted to raise—

**Chi Onwurah** *rose*—

**Mr Whittingdale**: But before doing so I will give way to the hon. Lady.

**Chi Onwurah**: The right hon. Gentleman is being generous. I fear that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) is confusing gravity with geography. Of course, it is entirely possible to trade with nations around the world, but the issue in today's integrated supply chains is the speed with which parts can be delivered into advanced automated manufacturing. Is the right hon. Gentleman arguing that it is equally quick and efficient to get a part from Chicago as it is to get it from Munich, for example?

**Mr Whittingdale**: I understand the hon. Lady's argument, but this is not a binary choice. I want us to have a strong trading agreement with the European Union, and I am confident that we will obtain that under this Government, but that does not exclude us from also having much stronger trading relationships with other countries around the world.

**Suella Braverman** (Fareham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Whittingdale**: I will give way perhaps one last time.

**Suella Braverman**: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is making an excellent speech and many points with which I agree. On the point raised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), does my right hon. Friend agree that our focus will rightly be on negotiating a good trade deal with the EU after Brexit day? However, our ability to negotiate with the US is just as important. Both are vital to increase export opportunities for UK businesses, but the US trade agreement is important so that we can increase our leverage with the EU.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that we will get on with negotiating those agreements simultaneously as soon as possible.

Coming back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) about the strength of our voice in international affairs, I understand that some of our partners in the European Union will miss our voice within the Council. We have been a strong voice on issues such as standing up to Russia and the imposition of sanctions, but there are many other opportunities for us to have a decisive influence. We are still a member of the United Nations Security Council, and we are the second biggest contributor to NATO. We will play an active role in the Council of Europe and in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, where I am proud to be a member of the Parliamentary Assembly.

I want to highlight one particular organisation—I happen to be the chair of the British group—and that is the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I would encourage new Members to get involved in the IPU. It was founded 130 years ago by Randal Cremer, a British statesman, and Frédéric Passy, a Frenchman, and we have recently celebrated that anniversary. It now comprises 179 countries, and its purpose is to strengthen relations between Parliaments. It is possible to pursue issues through parliamentary dialogue that are sometimes impossible to raise between Governments, and I will give one or two examples. It was in 1984 that the IPU invited a delegation to the UK from the Soviet Union. The delegation was led by a then pretty much unknown Russian politician called Mikhail Gorbachev. That led to the meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev and, as a result, it eventually led to the reform of the Soviet Union. Indeed, it led to the collapse of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union.

**Bob Stewart:** You were probably there, John.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I was not quite there.

I also point to the dialogue we have built up over a number of years between parliamentarians from the UK and those of Argentina, and the good relations that now exist between our two countries have been fostered through that dialogue. We also have dialogue with North Korea. I hope we will continue to give our full support to the IPU, which is a valuable organisation for developing relations with countries with which there are sometimes considerable tensions.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend add the Commonwealth to his list of organisations that will be increasingly important? We have a number of very close ties with the Commonwealth, to which we need to add free trade ties. We will be able to do that once we are no longer represented by the European Union, which has not done it. In connection to that, does he think it would be a good idea for Her Majesty's Government now to offer practical help to Australia at her time of trouble? A lot of people in this country feel we have close links with Australia and ought to show our sympathy in a more practical way.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. There are many people in this country who feel close ties with Australia, despite the geographical distance that separates us. I hope the Government, as I believe they will, will give any help to Australia that is requested.

Soft power allows us to exert a far greater influence in the world than our size would perhaps suggest. The UK is perhaps the most effective country in the world in deploying soft power. We have huge assets, perhaps the greatest of which is the English language, which is the second language of almost every country in the world. We take advantage of that, and students from all across the world want to come to study in British schools and British universities.

We use the British Council to promote UK culture around the world, and I encourage my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to continue giving full support to the British Council in its excellent work. The other organisation with which I have had some involvement over recent years is the BBC, and I am an absolute supporter of the BBC World Service. The World Service is now approaching its target of reaching 500 million people every week. It is by far the most respected media organisation internationally, and its reports are not regarded as propaganda or fake news. People across the world rely on the BBC World Service.

**Catherine West:** The right hon. Gentleman is making an excellent contribution on the BBC World Service. Does he agree that part of the current issue in Iran is the worrying pressure that BBC Persian journalists are being put under due to the current chaos in Iran?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. I was delighted to host an IPU/BBC World Service event at which we heard from the head of the BBC Persian service. Its journalists are all based in London, and they dare not travel to Iran. It is their families who are being harassed and persecuted, which is wholly unacceptable, and I know it is one of the issues that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised and, I hope, will continue to raise.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on media freedom, and this is an excellent example. I commend the Government's work on media freedom. It was my right hon. Friend's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), who made media freedom a priority and who hosted the international conference in London last year. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is continuing that work and has already told the House about his recent meeting with the Canadians, who have also led on this.

We have made some progress. Forty-nine journalists died last year, which is a historically low figure, but it is still 49 too many. Perhaps worryingly, a greater proportion than in previous years died outside conflict zones and were perhaps deliberately targeted, often by their own Government. Three hundred and eighty-nine journalists are still in prison around the world, with nearly half of them in three countries: China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In her speech, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury talked about the death of Jamal Khashoggi. I completely agree with her that although we are told that some people have been held responsible, the masterminds behind that murder have not yet been identified. Nor, I suspect, have the masterminds been identified in another shocking case from just a couple of years ago, which is the death of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, a country in the European Union where the ramifications are still being felt. There is still

work to do on media freedom, and I am pleased that that was highlighted in the Queen's Speech and that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gives it such priority.

I wish quickly to mention one other issue. As I think you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I also chair the all-party group on Ukraine. I was delighted to meet the Ukrainian ambassador earlier today, and I am grateful to colleagues from all parties who came and signed the book of condolence for the families of those who died in the plane crash. It is now nearly four years since Russia illegally occupied part of the sovereign state of Ukraine—Crimea—and since the fighting broke out in the east of Ukraine. It is plain that those actions by Russia were in breach of all international law. We have taken sanctions, but they have proved ineffectual so far: the Russians are still in occupation in Crimea and the fighting in Donbass continues. Just last week, another three Ukrainians died in that fighting.

We have a responsibility: first, because we were one of the original signatories of the Budapest memorandum, which guaranteed the sovereign integrity of Ukraine in return for Ukraine's giving up its nuclear arsenal; and secondly, because a European country has been invaded. I hope we will continue to support President Zelensky in his efforts, but the Gracious Speech also refers to sanctions. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that, now that we are leaving the European Union, it gives us an opportunity to impose stronger sanctions without having to reach agreement throughout the European Union.

Not only would I like to see sanctions against the people responsible for the invasion of Ukraine and, indeed, against those Ukrainians who have previously stolen money—much of which has not yet been found—from their own country, but we should also take advantage of the Magnitsky list, which the House passed yet has so far not been implemented. Media freedom is an excellent example—I commend the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which was chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat)—of where there is a real opportunity to add teeth to our words about the importance of media freedom by taking out sanctions against those responsible.

I commend the Gracious Speech, particularly for its emphasis on international affairs and the attention that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary rightly gave to these issues in his contribution.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the SNP spokesman, may I say to colleagues that I hope we can manage this afternoon's debate without having a formal time limit? I would particularly like to do that because several maiden speeches are about to be made and it is a much better atmosphere for a maiden speech if the clock is not being watched for every second. We will manage to do it if everybody limits their speeches to around about nine to 10 minutes, which is quite a long time. I hasten to say that if colleagues cannot say it in nine minutes, perhaps they should think about whether to say it at all. It can be done, and if it is, it will show wonderful discipline and show those making their maiden speeches just how the Chamber can work at its best. In mentioning nine minutes, I make no particular criticism of the speeches

that have already been given, particularly from the Front Bench, but also from everyone else. [*Interruption.*] I am digging a hole, so I am going to stop. We have been very disciplined so far; I am sure we will continue to be disciplined.

5.19 pm

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assure you that I always try to make my words as meaningful and as brief as possible. I am also coming from the European Union Parliament where a nine to 10-minute speech is, as my good friend the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) knows, an acre of expanse, but I will certainly keep my words brief today.

I have listened carefully to the contributions thus far, and, as we approach Burns season, what strikes me is what our national poet said:

“O wad some po'ër the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us.”

I look forward to the note from *Hansard* asking me to explain that. Global Britain is not just how Britain wants to be perceived; it is how the rest of the world judges Britain by its actions and its deeds. Warm words and sympathy are in no short supply in this place, but the world is watching, and it is watching Britain right now very carefully. I believe that we are at a crossroads—I say “we” quite deliberately, much as we have a different perspective from these Benches.

I am, as I say, new to this place, but I was elected to the European Parliament in 2004. I have served there since, lately on the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, with a particular emphasis on the middle east and north Africa. I grew up in Saudi Arabia, so I have sand in my blood. I will always have a close interest in the middle east and what is going on there. That is a subject on which I look forward to engaging with colleagues.

I also bring an unashamedly European style to my politics. I believe that we get more done when we focus on where we agree, not on where we differ. I believe that we get more done when we strive for consensus, even if, perhaps, it cannot be found. When he visited the European Parliament, German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that the European Union is based on the revolutionary idea that our opponent might have a point. That is always my politics. That is always the attitude that I bring. I do hope that the Foreign Secretary has received my email suggesting a coffee. I look forward to discussing where we do agree, and I look forward to working with colleagues across the House on where we agree. Where there is alignment of our view on Scotland's best interests with global Britain, I will not be shy in agreeing.

Having said that, it is just possible that we might not agree on everything, because we on these Benches are not committed to Britain in the world. We wish it well, but it is not our project. We are committed to an independent Scotland in Europe. I was not always a nationalist, but I have concluded that Scotland's best interests would be best served as an independent state in the European Union.

I said in my maiden speech back in December that I regret that Brexit is happening, but I accept that it is happening. I am not about fighting old battles; I am not

[Alyn Smith]

about tilting at windmills. However, I do say to colleagues on the Government Benches—Members should trust me when I bring my European experience to bear on this—that leaving the European Union is the easy bit. What comes next is a quantum shift in complexity, and, because of the timetable that has been set, urgency. It is my view—others may disagree—that Brexit will leave global Britain poorer in every sense, weaker in every sense and less secure and less safe in every sense, unless we work together to get this right.

The view from the SNP Benches is that the implications of Brexit on foreign affairs and security co-operation are very far from clear. We have a number of documents in the conditional tense. They have not been agreed or signed off—at least not by the European Parliament. There is an interest in a close co-operation on the SNP Benches. We would very strongly urge Norway levels of co-operation with the EU, particularly on security issues. That will keep us safer—that will keep our citizens safer. It is in all our best interests to work towards that, and if that is where the Government are heading, I pledge the support of these Benches much as we have our difficulties and differences on other things.

It is also in the interests of democracy within these islands—we have heard mention of it already—to release the Russia report. The document exists. Grave concerns have been raised about external interference in the UK's democracy. A document exists that has not been published for dubious reasons. It should be published now so that we can all see where things are. Surely when we are looking to be a beacon of best practice to the world, credibility begins at home.

An issue that is close to Scotland's heart is international development. We very warmly support and welcome the 0.7% commitment on international aid, but that is not without caveats. We are concerned about the increasing politicisation of the aid budget. We are very concerned about the suggestion that the Department for International Development could be wound into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We think that would be an entirely retrograde step. We are pleased that it has been abandoned for the moment, but this is a continuing trend.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is making an excellent speech. On the very point that he is discussing, the staff of DFID, particularly those in my constituency in East Kilbride, contribute so much in relation to providing aid worldwide and excellent programmes. Having been chair of the all-party group for disability, I particularly consider its excellent work in getting children with disabilities into school. Does my hon. Friend agree that such work must be protected? It must be protected to protect the UK's reputation, but also in relation to jobs, the wider economy and the good that we do internationally.

**Alyn Smith:** I very warmly agree. My hon. Friend is of course no stranger to DFID. SNP Members want to see that work and independence protected and maintained, but the trend we have seen is concerning. In 2017, DFID managed only 72% of official development assistance, down from 88% in 2013. Given the budgets being spent by other Departments, we think that is a retrograde drift that we need to reverse. We want to see

an independent DFID—not part of the FCO—and we want the budget to be focused on climate change. The world is moving fast. We need to see a strong effort on climate change, because it is a global imperative that we very strongly support. The International Development Committee has called for this, and we would welcome and support moves towards it.

We are not going to agree on everything, but, as I have said, where we do agree I will not be shy of agreeing. “Perspective” is not just another way of saying “opinion”; we see the world differently on the SNP Benches. I am a Scottish European. I wish global Britain well; where we agree, we will agree. But Scotland is a European nation, and Scotland has not yet been heard on this.

5.26 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): It was genuinely a pleasure to hear the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) express himself in such fluent and consensual terms. The fact that he says his party is willing to agree with Government Members does not come as a surprise to me, because I know from my experience on the last two iterations of the Defence Committee, where I had the pleasure of serving alongside two Members of the SNP, that that is exactly true. That is how it was that, on a cross-party basis, all three parties represented on the Committee were able to agree at quite an early stage that defence expenditure is too low, and that something in the order of 3% of GDP is a more realistic target if Britain is to hold her head up in the world with safety.

Before I develop that theme, however, I want to pick up one point from the excellent speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), and that is his reference to the BBC, in which he concentrated on the World Service. In about 2011, when the then Sir Ming Campbell and I were both members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, I remember that we learned with alarm of the coalition Government's plan to stop the ring-fenced funding not only of the BBC World Service but of the vital BBC Monitoring Service based at Caversham Park. We expressed the view at the time that the result of putting that funding on the shoulders of the BBC in return for allowing the BBC to have its usual requested rise in the licence fee would come back to bite us—and so it did, because both those budgets were badly squeezed, and I think I am right in saying that in the end the Government felt it necessary to restore separate funding for the BBC World Service, but sadly not for the BBC Monitoring Service.

**Mr Whittingdale:** The position is that the BBC continues to fund the World Service, but it now receives an additional grant from the Foreign Office that has allowed it to expand its services. I very much hope that the Foreign Office will continue—and perhaps increase—that funding.

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, but the trouble is that no such grant was made to the BBC Monitoring Service, which is our principal source of what is called open-source intelligence—or, as the BBC prefers to say, open-source information. The Defence Committee produced a hard-hitting report entitled “Open Source Stupidity”, because that was entirely our opinion of the effect of that cutback by the coalition Government. It led directly to the closure of Caversham Park, and although BBC

Monitoring continues to do very good work, it is a shame and a disgrace that it is not specially separately funded, as it used to be.

Coming back to the main topic, this is, as we know, a debate on Britain's future place in the world. However magnified, however static or even however reduced our future place in the world may be, we have to be able to keep our country safe. As I never tire of explaining to the House, the basis of any sensible defence policy depends on three concepts: deterrence, containment, and a realisation of the unpredictability of future conflicts. The examples I always give—I fear that people will start joining in in a chorus if I do it again, but I do so nevertheless—are the Yom Kippur war in 1973 that took hyper-sensitive Israel by surprise, the Falklands war in 1982 that took us by surprise, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that took everybody by surprise, and the 9/11 attacks in 2001 that took the world's then only superpower by surprise.

What do I conclude from the fact that most wars in the 20th century—I could give many more older examples—were usually not predicted significantly in advance? I conclude that if we are going to have an adequate defence policy, we have to be able to defend flexibly against a whole spectrum of future potential threats because we do not know which of those threats is going to materialise.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech and excellent points. I want to draw him back to his comments about spending at least 3%. I do not believe that it is about 3%; it is about having the capability we need. The key word he has used is “flexibility”, and that does not have a percentage price on it; it has an equipment and capability price.

**Dr Lewis:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. However, I have found through long experience that although it is a rather crude shorthand, this business of percentages is the one straightforward, simple and clear way of showing to the country what has been happening in relative terms, compared with other high spending Departments, to defence expenditure.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** May I urge the right hon. Gentleman not to oversimplify what is actually complex, and rightly so? Should not the debate be led by capability over the simplicity of saying that we meet a certain target? We do an assessment of where the threat picture is at, we determine what capability is required to meet that threat assessment, and we spend the money accordingly. Targets, while simple and easy to understand, do not paint the whole picture.

**Dr Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He came in as if on cue, because I was just about to paint what I regard as the spectrum of threats that are necessary to give us the flexibility that we need to have if we are going to prepare an adequate defence policy.

**John Redwood:** Does my right hon. Friend agree as well that in order to have flexibility, it is very important that we have the key military technologies under our own control, and the industrial capability of flexing up and greatly increasing our output of weaponry should disaster hit and we need to respond?

**Dr Lewis:** I do, and in this there is an important rebuttal of a point often made by those who think we can afford to cut out certain capabilities because we are members of an alliance and we can rely on other allies to supply capabilities that we ourselves do not have. That leaves out of account what happens if, heaven forbid, we are involved in a major conflict and one of our allies is knocked out and no longer able to supply us with the missing capabilities. So while we cannot do everything, we have to be able to do as many things as are possible within a reasonable financial envelope. My point about the percentages is that they give us a rough idea of what is reasonable at any given time in a country's circumstances.

The spectrum of threats ranges from, at the most extreme end, nuclear obliteration, through conventional defeat and subjugation, to what is generally regarded in the terminology as 21st-century threats—terrorism, subversion, infiltration, disinformation, cyber and space. In the short time remaining, I want to focus on the point about which I had an exchange with the Foreign Secretary during his speech, and that is the question of the defence review.

My concern goes back to 2017, when, as I referred to in my intervention, we had something called the national security capability review. That was meant to look at defence and security altogether, but it was also meant to be fiscally neutral, which meant that if we decided that we wanted to spend more on dealing with so-called 21st-century threats—I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) nodding in recollection of and, I hope, agreement with my analysis—such as subversion or disinformation or especially cyber, we had to start cutting core conventional capabilities.

I draw the House's attention, not for the first time, to a very revealing article in *The Guardian*, no less, on 26 June 2018, in which it was reported that there had been an “increasingly bitter stand-off” between the Treasury and the Ministry of Defence. It read:

“The row has its origins in July last year, when the Cabinet Office announced the national security adviser, Sir Mark Sedwill, would conduct a review of the threats facing the UK and the capabilities needed to meet them. His brief was to look at the UK security needs in the round, taking in the intelligence agencies as well as the MoD. He was also to evaluate the risks posed by terrorists and cyber-attacks as well as from conventional forces.”

That sounds rather similar to what we heard today. The article continues:

“By the autumn, it was clear the intelligence agencies had come out on top and the MoD was looking at being forced to make cuts, with options ranging from reducing the size of the army from 77,000 to 70,000, cutting 1,000 Royal Marines and decommissioning two specialist amphibious-landing ships, HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion.

There was a consensus among mandarins involved in the negotiations the UK was less likely to need two specialist amphibious landing ships than the ability to defend against a cyber-attack on its infrastructure or financial networks.

But there was a backlash from an informal coalition led by Williamson,”—

my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson)—

“appointed in November, and the chairman of the defence select committee... as well as a score or more Conservative MPs (and Labour ones with defence jobs in their constituencies)...

[Dr Julian Lewis]

One of the arguments from Tory backbenchers was the military were disproportionately represented”—

they mean under-represented—

“in negotiations dominated by politicians with no military background and by the intelligence agencies.

The counter-arguments were little aired in the media: that the UK should abandon its adherence to tradition and instead build a modern force, a pared-down one, with lower spending levels closer to comparable European neighbours. Compared with the UK’s 2.1% of GDP spent on defence, France spends 1.79%, Germany 1.2%... Italy 1.1% and Spain 0.9%.”

The cat was out of the bag—the establishment and the Treasury wanted us to reduce our spending on what is conventionally understood as defence in favour of new capabilities. I entirely agree that we need to spend more on new capabilities, but why does that mean that we have to spend less on conventional capabilities when, as I set out at the beginning, we have no idea what the nature of a future conflict will be? As the threats are augmented and the dangers multiply, we should be spending more, not less.

I return to that rough yardstick of the percentage terms. The Defence Committee spent a lot of time trying to work out what really had happened to defence, because, as we know, the criteria were changed for calculating our GDP percentage expenditure on defence. We were able to establish objectively that

“calculated on a historically consistent basis”,

in the last four years for which figures are available, although officially we spent 2.2%, 2.1%, 2.1% and 2.1%, in reality—on the basis on which it used to be calculated—we spent 1.9%, 1.8%, 1.8% and, again, 1.8%.

I conclude by saying that it used to be the case that in the 1980s we spent roughly the same on defence, on education and on health. We now spend two and a half times on education and four times on health what we spend on defence. No one is asking to go back to the levels of expenditure, comparatively speaking, of the 1980s, but even in the mid-1990s we felt ourselves able to invest 3% of GDP on keeping ourselves safe, not the 4% to 5% that we spent in the 1980s. That is a worthwhile target, an acceptable target and a target to which the Government need to aspire.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call Chi Onwurah.

5.41 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a real pleasure to speak in this, my first debate of the new decade, with you in the Chair and on such an important subject—Britain in the world. At a time when global politics seems to offer us so much to fear and as we leave the European Union, I was truly disappointed that the Queen’s Speech did not recognise the opportunities and challenges for my constituency and, indeed, for my region, as well as for the country, particularly given that the deal under which we are leaving the European Union is one of the worst possible.

Newcastle Central has a proud history of working with, trading with, acting in solidarity with and welcoming people from the world. We are not, as some would like to believe, an inward-looking region. In the 19th century, we welcomed the American abolitionist and escaped

slave Frederick Douglass to Newcastle, and residents of what is now Newcastle Central paid for his freedom. Traidcraft, which supports economic development across the world through trade, was founded in Newcastle. Hadrian’s wall, which runs through my constituency, was the boundary of the Roman world. Today, Geordies are to be found all over the world, while visitors to Newcastle celebrate its beautiful streets, vibrant nightlife and warm welcome from the people who live there. And we trade with the world. The north-east is the region that exports more than it imports—the only region in the country to do so—and 60% of that goes to Europe, supporting many jobs.

Before and during the election, I spoke to business leaders and owners, many of them Conservative voting, who were absolutely appalled at what they saw a Conservative Government doing to the business environment, particularly in the north-east. My job and that of MPs across the region is to improve our constituencies’ prosperity, enabling high-wage, high-skill jobs in the region. We have advanced manufacturing integrated supply chains that criss-cross the channel backwards and forwards multiple times, and we want more such supply chains as part of a green industrial revolution that will build a net zero economy by investing in green technologies and manufacturing.

And we can do it. We have the workforce in the north-east. We have 51,000 tech, engineering, maths and science students coming out of our universities every year, and we have great strengths in science, digital, energy, healthcare and business. But we need frictionless borders with our closest partners and agreed standards that define everything from the acceptable frequency of electromagnetic radiation to the atomic composition of a given chemical. Our relationship with the European Union is as much a matter of geography as it is of politics. The Prime Minister’s bad deal and the Conservatives’ recklessness over Brexit have already cost the region jobs, and I look forward to the new north-eastern Tory MPs joining me in ensuring that north-east manufacturing continues and in stopping the Prime Minister as he breaks his promises on trade, standards, workers and environmental rights. We can perhaps start this by seeing the letter of reassurances given to Nissan over Brexit and asking whether the current deal meets them.

Even before the prospect of Brexit, the UK was the most regionally divided country in Europe, and that is one aspect of our position in the world that needs to change. A recent report from Sheffield Hallam University found that the Government’s industrial strategy is going to widen the divisions in our country, not bridge them. The industrial strategy’s narrow sectoral focus targets only 10% of our manufacturing base and only 1% of the whole economy. We need to see an industrial strategy from the Government that builds our regional economies, and one small step would be if the Government were to commit now to delivering the funding for the Metro’s new trains, as our dilapidated and inadequate public transport system is a barrier to the regional economic integration that we need to match our supply chain integration. We also need to secure a strategic British engineering capability through investment in skills and lifelong learning.

As the Government turn away from Europe, they turn to the US. We have great cultural and economic links with the United States, and it is a country that I love and love to visit, but I do not think I am the only one who is concerned that we should become more

dependent on a US President who I think can accurately be described as, at the very least, volatile, and that raises concerns about our position in the world. We do not want, for example, to be following the United States on precarious working conditions, exorbitant health costs or chlorinated chicken, but those would clearly be on the table in any deal. Many of my constituents enjoy the beautiful countryside that surrounds Newcastle in Northumbria and County Durham, and that depends on the wellbeing of small-scale farmers, who could not stand up against the opening up of competition from the American agri-industrial machine; I was disappointed, again, that the Queen's Speech did not include any protection for them.

I also want to say a few words as chair of the all-party group on Africa. That group exists to support mutually beneficial relationships between the UK and Africa, and also to be a voice for the African diaspora in this country. If we are to have a win-win relationship with African countries, we need to ensure that any trade agreements made post Brexit between the UK and Africa respect and strengthen African interests as well as our own, and in particular the desire and ability of African countries to industrialise sustainably. So I welcome the UK-Africa summit that the Government are holding on Monday next week. The all-party group on Africa is holding a parliamentary symposium the day after, on future UK-Africa trade after Brexit, with the president of the African Development Bank giving a keynote address. The interest in this event is testament to the importance of our economic relationships with Africa and the opportunities that are included there. However, the UK cannot take advantage of those opportunities, or indeed be an outward-looking nation that is open for business, without improving the system that allows access to people. Our inquiry of July 2019 found that African visitors to the UK are twice as likely to be refused a visa than applicants from any other part of the world, which means that many African companies working in Africa are deciding to take their businesses elsewhere.

**Catherine West:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the area of science, it is terrible the way that the Home Office refuses visas all the time and sets back science and the progress we can make between Africa and UK science?

**Chi Onwurah:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that intervention, because it is absolutely true that scientific links, as well as being part of the UK's soft power, are in the interests of ensuring that we have sustainable industrialisation in Africa. To see so many African scientists refused visas to come here really goes against the interests of both the UK and the continent of Africa. What is absolutely clear is that UK Visas and Immigration's treatment of Africans is entirely at odds with the narrative of a global Britain post Brexit. Actions will weigh more than words. We cannot claim to be an open and global Britain if we continue to exclude so many people with a genuine need and desire to come to this country.

Britain's position in the world has been negatively impacted by the Brexit saga and shambles, but I believe we can and will recover. We are still looked to as one of the great democracies of the world. Our scientific influence, the advantage of our language and the budget the

Department for International Development spends will all ensure that we have influence in the world. We can stand up for human rights in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iran, Burma as well as in Kashmir and Palestine and many other countries and places, and we must do so. We should be under no illusion that democracy is embattled. Populism, xenophobia and electoral interference are both driving and a consequence of the challenges democracy faces. Cosying up to regimes such as the Hungarian Orbán and not standing up to President Trump does not put us on the right side of history when it comes to our position in the world. I want to see a stronger United Kingdom: strong on principles, with regionally successful economies, making its way on the global stage.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Let us try a little bit harder on the nine to 10 minutes. The hon. Lady was not too bad, but I put out this plea to people who have made many speeches in this place and will make many more: it is not fair to those making their maiden speeches today if I have to put on a time limit to get everyone in. That should not be necessary. Nine to 10 minutes is ages.

5.53 pm

**Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con):** I remember that my maiden speech was rather quicker—about four minutes—so I am glad you have given us a little bit longer, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to start with some condolences. Not only do the people of Ukraine and Iran deserve our condolences, but the people of Oman. Sultan Qaboos was a great friend of the UK. His partnership with our country has enabled a peace process in the region to go on for years, very quietly and very sensitively. He has been an enormous friend. I look forward to our Government working with Sultan Haitham in the years to come.

The past two years in Parliament have, for me, been shaped by chairing the Foreign Affairs Committee. It was a huge pleasure to have had that chance. We published some 23 reports and 24 special reports. We had amazing help from the most fantastic Clerks in Parliament. I would like, if I may, to name three Clerks of the Committee—Chris Stanton, Tom Goldsmith and Chris Shaw—and thank them for their amazing work. I would also like to pay tribute to the former Member for Fife, Stephen Gethins, who was a very dear friend of ours, and to Ann Clwyd, who sat with us and was absolutely inspirational in many different moments.

The overarching area that we covered was not the academic exercise of foreign ideas; it was how we best promote the interests of the British people. How do we ensure the prosperity and happiness of these islands? What should we aim for? Who should we work with and how? We looked for solutions to the problems we face and sat patiently through hours of testimony, listening carefully to witnesses to find ideas that would help us to change the world for the better for all of us. I hope that as a Committee we served this House and our country well.

Many ideas came out of our inquiries and some, I am glad to say, have been adopted. Others are enduring and could still be adopted, should the Minister wish to do so. The top five areas of work for me were defending

[Tom Tugendhat]

democracy against autocracies such as China and Russia; building bridges with partners such as India and Japan; growing businesses in new markets such as South America; our own organisation and the skills we need in our own Department to succeed; and, of course, starting afresh in Europe. We addressed the dangers to democracy in many reports, but none more so than our two reports entitled “Moscow’s Gold”, about the price of Russian money, and “A Cautious Embrace”, about the way in which some autocracies prey on our educational and cultural institutions. We argued each time that the Government must stand up for the values that make us stronger.

Those values define others, too. I am very glad that the Prime Minister is keen on bridge building, because there is a bridge that we would like him to build on: the living bridge that Prime Minister Modi speaks about—that link between peoples and between diasporas. The Home Secretary, who was an important contributor to that report, now has the power to put in place some of the recommendations she herself wrote: on simplifying the visa system; on making it easier for students, businesses and skilled workers to come to the UK from countries such as India; and on using technology to make things faster and cheaper. We must also look at new friends. Our report on South America did just that, calling for the trade commissioner’s team to be boosted and looking at how our great companies, such as JCB and Diageo, were already embedded in the continent and how much further we could go. When we look at the law, we see a platform that is being built on in those countries and could be built on elsewhere.

Closer to home, our new relationship with the European Union, and separately with the 27 sovereign nations that make it up, will be built on co-operation and friendship. I hear what the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) says, but we must hope for the continuation of that good will and co-operation. I know that we are asking a lot of our partners. We are asking them to change when they did not choose to, but the truth is change is coming to Europe anyway. We know that there are changes within the European Union and between European states already. The world has changed, so it is hardly surprising that we must look to change with it.

The transformation that Britain is about to undergo internationally will define much of the work of this Government. Despite that, the Committee found, sadly, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was too often unable to bring policy together. Sadly, it is not even paying diplomats as much as other civil servants. If we are to deliver a global Britain, we need a clear direction and high morale to attract those who will shape our place in the world. That means a clear focus on the task ahead. We have an opportunity and a Government ready to set a course for ourselves and, I hope, for the world, with the kind of foreign policy that will be exciting and ambitious, and which I believe can be done.

Why am I so confident? The mandarin who was quoted in *The Sunday Times* last week, saying that this Administration do not care about foreign policy, is clearly wrong. The handling of the Iran crisis, leaving pressure to mount on the dictators in Tehran and not giving them an easy escape, has shown a deftness that

we have been lacking for too long. Last month, the Government won the ability to deliver, and for the first time in almost a decade, we have a British Government that can decide a policy, shape it and make it happen. That will change the calculations of others, and while our partners may struggle, our Prime Minister is for the moment unchallenged at home. That gives confidence to friends and focuses the minds of enemies. The word of No. 10, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary is now real and deliverable and can be relied on, so now is the moment to build new partnerships.

I was privileged as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee to welcome delegations from around the world, and one thing that struck me was, as the hon. Member for Stirling put it, how we are seen ourselves—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me for waking him from his reverie. When I met groups from South Korea, Japan, Colombia and many others, I heard from them that we are a partner that they seek to join. That is important, because they see not just our departure from the European Union, but our co-operation in networks such as the UN, NATO and the Commonwealth, which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) champions so frequently, and many more besides—many of them born out of the imagination of British diplomats over many years.

**Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** I am proud to serve under my hon. Friend’s chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on which I have served for the last 10 years. He would not want to end his remarks without referring to our reports on the British overseas territories and our success in persuading the Foreign Office at last to allow territories and dependencies the right to lay a wreath on Remembrance Sunday to remember those from the overseas territories and Crown dependencies who fought and died. It has taken years for that to happen and, because of our report, it has finally occurred.

**Tom Tugendhat:** I would love to claim credit for that, but the truth is that it is my hon. Friend’s work. He has championed that over a decade and has made a difference not just to the high commissioners, ambassadors and premiers who come to London, but to the hundreds of veterans and thousands of their families who are watching from around the world, seeing this home of remembrance every year.

The British Government should recognise that we have two pretty simple aims that we can, and should, go for: the happiness and the prosperity of the British people—no more than that. That is the strategic goal of any British Administration, and the question now is how we should deliver that. I think that we can build on three areas. We want an open world where the rule of law, freedom of navigation and freedom of trade, alongside the protection of our climate and human rights, work together by defending international treaties, by creating common practice and sometimes by independent action. This is what shaped our past, and although we should not try to go back there, we should certainly learn from it.

Fractures with Europe over history have seen us sail to the East and West Indies developing trading networks in ways that we would never replicate today, but that reminds of us a wider world. Today, partnering with new independent trading nations as equals, we have a new opportunity: to bring the new Indies together.

Over the past 70 years, we have heard one mantra constantly: alignment—alignment with everyone, alignment around the world. Whether it is with the European Union or others, it has seemed that the only way to get ahead is to replicate, and we must look to change that. More than ever, we need a world that dares to experiment and innovate, to get the best ideas and solutions for the challenges that we face. That requires an independence of mind. Not being part of the three great continental trading blocs—China, the European Union and the United States—this new group could focus on recognition, rather than alignment, and new ways of working together: a less rigid partnership, more Commonwealth, perhaps, than common purpose. That may be the better starting point. Many of my friends may be surprised to hear me say this, because I remain a passionate European—I would have to be with a wife who is French, and I remain still afeared of her. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) put it, Britain is and will remain in Europe, but of course, Europe is not Brussels.

Europe is 450 million people. Its cultures are as diverse as the people in northern Finland and southern Italy. It is what has given us and the world amazing art and culture, science and innovation. That came not from common alignment, but from competition and experimentation that led to the natural selection of ideas. Europe's fractured land mass allowed ideas to take root and allowed experiments to find different solutions to the problems we face. Co-operation, not unanimity, should be what we aim for, and not just with Europe. The new Indies—the new partnerships—will be a way to build that.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman has spoken passionately about many parts of the world. In terms of the horn of Africa in particular, he knows that I am a long-term supporter of the cause of Somaliland, a place where not only do we have trading potential and great historical and cultural links with what was a British protectorate, but the Department for International Development plays a key role. Does he agree that such regions and countries are places where we could bring all parts of British foreign policy together?

**Tom Tugendhat:** My hon. Friend—I say that because he is a friend—is absolutely right: it is about the way that we partner with countries around the world, including Somaliland, bringing together not just foreign or aid efforts, but sometimes justice, the rule of law, policing and maybe even defence to make sure that we have a co-operative and integrated approach to delivering real change to such countries. That is exactly where we should be going.

Forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker; I will wrap up very quickly. Our role should be to build on the insurance model that we had, and to remember that we can underwrite many of the ways that the world has traded in looking at the norms that we set out. Just as we sailed the seas, we must sail the new accountancy, looking at ways to create entities that share the responsibility that we expect of companies with aspiration and innovation. We need a revolution in thinking, and we need to experiment with regulations that promote growth and opportunity.

This will not work as long as the rules are regularly flouted. That is why China's adherence to the rule of law is of great concern. State-owned and state-subsidised business such as Huawei not only use data from police states where human rights are regularly violated—such as Xinjiang—but seek a market dominance that we should resist. Urging South Korea's Samsung and Japan's Fujitsu to bid in the 5G world would make more sense than deepening our dependence on the Chinese Communist party. This is a 70th birthday gift that it does not need. Closer to home, Russia's rhetoric and aggression are a reminder that we need to remain vigilant, and our nuclear fleet remains an essential part of our defence. It is to this world that the Government's new foreign and defence review should respond, and it needs to be ambitious.

We want a world of opportunity and investment, where we can not only stretch our wings but partner with others. That will sometimes mean the United States, it will sometimes mean Europe, and it will sometimes mean others around the world, but as global Britain, we need global partners. As we chart a new course for our country, I am glad that we are looking forward. Too much of the past four years has been spent looking backwards and fighting battles that have been settled. I am glad that we have a Prime Minister who has set out an ambitious agenda, because that ambition matters. I am grateful that you have given me the time to explore these ideas, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** It is a great pleasure to call Daisy Cooper to make her maiden speech.

6.7 pm

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): It is a great honour to make my maiden speech following many other accomplished and passionate speakers. My constituency of St Albans is very proud of its contribution both to Britain's history and to Britain's place in the world. Alban himself is the first recorded Christian martyr and Britain's first saint. He was executed for giving shelter to a stranger fleeing persecution, and his grave is a site of pilgrimage to this day. Then there is Magna Carta, the great charter of liberties, which has shaped democracies around the world. The very first meetings that led to the drafting of that charter were held in St Albans Abbey. Today, the abbey is surrounded by pubs—lots and lots of pubs. St Albans has more pubs per square mile than any other place in Great Britain and they are steeped in our nation's history, too.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Let's all head to St Albans.

**Daisy Cooper:** You are very welcome. The war of the roses started on the doorstep of The Boot, and Oliver Cromwell stayed the night at the inn now known as Ye Olde Fighting Cocks. These two pubs and many more in St Albans and around the country are under threat like never before. They have suffered a crippling rise in business rates, and the measures announced in this Queen's Speech to help small retail businesses will not benefit those pubs whose business rates are calculated differently and which have a higher rateable value. In St Albans and around the UK, there are pockets of pubs that have had rate increases of between 100% and 2,000%. They need urgent help if they are to survive the

[Daisy Cooper]

next few months, let alone the centuries to come. It would be a cruel end indeed if these pubs, which have withstood the English civil wars, were finished off by a broken, outdated and unfair system of tax.

To keep our pubs going, the Save St Albans Pubs campaign has mapped out many pub crawls. These crawls will take you through the 100-acre Verulamium park, with its Roman walls and ruins, and to the abbey, home to medieval art hidden for 500 years, until now. Visitors and locals alike can walk through the Sopwell ruins. More alarmingly these days, we can also walk along the often dried-up riverbed of the River Ver, one of the most precious chalk streams in the world. Indeed, my predecessor, Anne Main, warned in her maiden speech in 2005 that the River Ver was in danger of drying up, and yet here we are. I would like to say, despite our many political differences, that Anne contributed 14 years of public service to St Albans and to Parliament. I would like to pay a sincere tribute to her for that.

St Albans is not just a place of history; it is a place of international innovation. St Albans is in Hertfordshire, the county of opportunity. Around the city, we have a number of beautiful villages. Bricket Wood is home to the world's leading building-science centre, the British Research Establishment, and dotted in and around are many other villages that are home to tech and research businesses. These cutting-edge British-based businesses are harnessing technology and knowledge to produce new products, new jobs and new solutions. Technology offers great potential to tackle many of our modern global challenges, and modern technology, science and research are international. British business requires the easy movement of people and skills across borders. This country has benefited from its EU membership, and our research and development sector is just one example of that. My fellow residents in St Albans do not wish to lose the benefits of such close collaboration and alliances.

Close international collaboration and alliance between Britain and our international cousins is essential if we are to tackle the biggest threat of all: the climate crisis. My fellow constituents in St Albans want tough action to avert climate disaster, including a complete moratorium on airport expansion, including at nearby Luton airport. We want to protect our local natural environment. In St Albans, a significant chunk of our green belt is at risk from the monstrosity of a rail and lorry freight terminal. Our chalk streams, including the River Ver in St Albans, are now in crisis, from both over-extraction and the changing climate. Some 85% of the world's chalk streams are located in England, and most of those are in Hertfordshire. They are known as England's Amazon for a reason. These precious ecosystems are a unique global asset. Even without further harm, it will take decades for them to recover.

As hon. Members can see, St Albans is blessed with a rich cultural history, cutting-edge businesses, wonderful pubs—did I mention the pubs?—and beautiful green belt. You can see why St Albans is often described as a wealthy, leafy, commuter town 20 miles north of London, but, like many places across the UK, we only have to scratch the surface to see that some people in St Albans are really, really struggling. There is a rising use of food banks and a growing presence of homelessness. There is palpable frustration at how public services, including

the NHS and schools, are chronically underfunded and alarm at the rapid increase in crime from county lines. The St Albans-to-London commute should be easy but is often an unreliable, uncomfortable and increasingly unaffordable ride.

To conclude, St Albans has a lot of history to draw upon, but our outlook is to the future. Over the centuries, our magnificent history has continued to inspire. From martyrdom to Magna Carta and the uprising of Icen's Boudicca, St Albans has a timeless tradition of being at the heart of our country's fights for greater democracy, liberties and freedoms. We believe in St Albans that Britain should be open and internationalist. We believe we should work with our closest international neighbours to tackle the global climate crisis. We believe in our responsibility to take in those fleeing persecution and war, as Alban himself did and as St Albans has continued to do, taking in children and families from 1940s London to 21st-century Syria. I am honoured to represent my fellow residents of St Albans here in Parliament and fully intend to honour our traditions and values during the months and years ahead.

6.16 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): I am delighted to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I congratulate the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) on her excellent maiden speech. She has certainly made an early impact and I know will contribute much to this place, particularly for her constituents.

It is really good to be back here after two years' absence, and I am grateful for the trust that the people of Meon Valley have placed in me. I will do all I can to work for them. I also thank the House of Commons staff for their warm welcome back. I have always been grateful for their support and look forward to working with them over the next few years. During those two years, I was fortunate to work for several organisations. I had a brief period as the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and spent time learning about the Hampshire constabulary, how hard they work and how remarkable that is given they are the lowest-funded force relative to population. I will use my time here to support the police and public sector workers throughout the constituency.

During the past two years, I have also worked with veterans as chair of the south-east Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee, and I am very pleased now that we have an Office for Veterans' Affairs, as veterans have particular needs that we here should support. My other public appointment is with the National Citizen Service. I have seen the impact of the NCS in Portsmouth and further afield and was pleased to be part of the board and the new royal charter. The NCS is open to 16-year-olds, and the premise on which it was started by David Cameron when he was Prime Minister—to bring communities together and instil confidence in the volunteering culture—has impacted on more than half a million young people. It has been transformational.

I want to say a few words about my predecessor, Sir George Hollingbery. I have known George for more than 20 years, ever since we were both councillors on Winchester City Council. George was elected three years after me and I was appointed as his mentor. Those who know George will know that this meant I had very little to do. My most memorable experience of campaigning

for George in 2005 was the drive to tackle drunkenness by roving the streets of Winchester late on Friday night handing out Mars bars to those in need—apparently they reduce the effect of alcohol. George was a fantastic MP for Meon Valley and I hope to fill his shoes. In Parliament, he was a well-liked PPS, Whip and Trade Minister. In particular, I would like to mention his time with my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) when she was Home Secretary and then Prime Minister. I know that she found him a close and supportive friend during her time in office, and likewise I know how proud he is of the role he played in her Administration.

Meon Valley has felt like home to me since my parents moved there 33 years ago, following a life moving around the world with the Army and intelligence services. After many years of travelling, it was the first place I really felt we had settled down, and my home has been close by in Winchester and Portsmouth ever since. I was lucky that my parents were able to take on childcare duties while I pursued my career as an Ofsted inspector and city councillor. Meon Valley is a largely rural seat, with the wonderful countryside of the South Downs national park spanning much of it, and dotted with picturesque villages and market towns. I feel very lucky to have been elected to a seat with some of the best pubs in the country—not St Albans, but Meon Valley—which I visit frequently. Members have an open invitation if they would like to accompany me to the many small breweries or the vineyards, which make some of the finest sparkling wine in the country.

Much of the population is in the south-east corner of the constituency, in Waterlooville, Cowplain, Hart Plain and Horndean, just north of Portsmouth. There are close links with the armed forces, especially the Royal Navy. Waterlooville is reportedly named after a pub called The Heroes of Waterloo, because on its opening day, in 1815, it was thronged with soldiers returning from victory against Napoleon.

The constituency also played a big part in D-day. Churchill used an armoured train parked in the sidings of Droxford station as the base for preparations for the Normandy landings. He used it to meet with numerous Ministers, military commanders and leaders of allied nations. On 4 June 1944, he met Charles de Gaulle there and informed him of the invasion plans, quite late in the day. Southwick House provided the supreme headquarters of the expeditionary force for D-day and is still there for everyone to see.

Meon Valley is also home to the cradle of cricket. In 1750, Hambledon cricket club was founded and took on responsibility for developing the rules of modern-day cricket in The Bat and Ball pub during club meetings. It is a game of patience and skill, which brings me to the topic of this debate, foreign policy and aid. I mentioned that I moved around the world as part of a military and Foreign Office family. I have seen at first hand the impact that Britain has had on various parts of the world and where our values and aid have helped many people. I am a great believer in soft power organisations such as the British Council and the BBC World Service, alongside our aid budget and sporting links.

My husband and I were living in the New York area during 9/11 and heard how people listened to the BBC World Service for unbiased information. After the Army, my father served in the intelligence services. As I said in

my maiden speech previously, we openly praise the work of the armed forces—quite rightly—but not so much those who keep us safe without recognition. I pay particular tribute to everyone who works in the intelligence services and especially those, such as my father, in the Secret Intelligence Service, which is sometimes referred to as MI6. These people put themselves often in the very gravest danger to promote and defend British interests and extend British values. They do it without thought of credit or personal gain. That is hugely inspirational, and I intend to support any measures that give them the resources that they need to continue that work.

As some Members know, I was born in Aden in Yemen, which is something that I now have in common with only one other Member, the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz). I pay tribute to her brother, Keith Vaz, the former Member for Leicester East, who chaired the all-party parliamentary group on Yemen for many years. We both spoke frequently in debates in this Chamber about the forgotten war in Yemen, where civilians are suffering not just as a result of direct violence, but through famine and malnutrition, including thousands of children. I am concerned that, with our eyes often turned in horror to the cowardly and profane actions of Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and with tensions with Iran once more rising, we have not given the crisis in Yemen the attention that it so desperately needs. I will continue to bang the drum on behalf of its people and ask the British Government to continue to lead in peace discussions to bring about the peace and stability that Yemen needs. As part of those efforts, I am helping to re-establish the all-party parliamentary group on Yemen. I hope that Members listening will consider joining.

I am pleased to co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on women, peace and security, alongside Baroness Hodgson, as it is often women who bear the brunt of war and atrocities. We will be working to highlight that in conferences this year.

I have also lived in many Commonwealth countries, such as Nigeria, Pakistan, India and Australia, as well as the United Arab Emirates and the USA. As we leave the EU on the 31st of this month, we will have an exciting opportunity to strengthen our relationships with those countries and the rest of the world. I look forward to supporting the Government as we strengthen our own trade deals and other links. We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that Europe remains our neighbour and friend. I hope that we can remain a leading and supportive nation among our European allies, even as we extend our horizons further afield. I look forward to working with the Government on foreign policy and our one nation domestic agenda and, most importantly, to working hard for my constituents in Meon Valley.

6.24 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond), who has made her non-maiden speech, and to welcome her back to the House. When she was here representing the interests of constituents in Portsmouth South, she had a reputation for bringing an intelligent and thoughtful analysis to the debate. It is clear that her time away from the House has, if anything, served to improve that ability, so she is very welcome back.

[*Mr Alistair Carmichael*]

I am also particularly pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), who made an alarmingly accomplished maiden speech. I suspect that following her in the speaking order is something that I will just have to get used to. I confess that I did not know that St Albans was as well provided with licensed premises as we now know it is. I am my hon. Friend's mentor, and it strikes me that perhaps my duties might extend beyond Westminster and may require me to spend some time mentoring her in her constituency.

The hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) made the important point that in many or, indeed, most parts of the world, the United Kingdom is still seen as a force for good on the world stage, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and also because we have a long and distinguished history of standing up for the values of democracy and human rights. We do not always meet the standards that we might reasonably set ourselves, but, taken as a whole, we are seen in a positive light, and I think that is going to matter more now than ever.

The recent assassination of Soleimani in Iraq has definitely raised the temperature in what is an already febrile region. I do not mourn Soleimani at all. The man was a butcher, make no mistake about that. Others have said that he doubtless had the blood of British service personnel on his hands, and I think that is almost certainly the case. The difficulty is that once we start to use that as the rationale for actions of that sort, where do we go next and where do we stop? The same accusation could ultimately have been made against parliamentarians in different conflicts in different parts of the world down the years, most recently, possibly, even against some of those who have sat in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I therefore urge some caution in using that as a justification for the assassination of Soleimani.

The lack of an early response from the Prime Minister was, I would suggest, a mistake. It was not a catastrophic error, but it is one from which we must learn, and it brings into question the ever-changing nature of our special relationship with the United States. I say that it is ever changing because it is clear that different Presidents of the United States bring different aspects to that relationship. It is important to remember that our special relationship is with the United States and her people, not with any Administration that happens to be in the White House at any given time. We need to be alive to the possibility that this is perhaps one of those moments in that relationship when we have to be more prepared than previously to plough our own furrow in foreign affairs. It is not the first time that we find ourselves in that position.

I am a lot more optimistic than I was this time last week. What has happened has brought us to the brink. We looked into the abyss, we saw what the consequences of that sort of conflagration would be and now, when even the Saudi Arabians are saying that we have to de-escalate tensions, there is a willingness to find a way back from the brink. I would suggest that, from that situation of confusion and some folly, some opportunities may be found. It is important that we as a country should clarify what our objectives are now in relation to Iran and, I would add, Iraq. I think it would be good if

we could identify as an ultimate, aspirational goal the demilitarisation of foreign powers in Iraq. That, if we were to achieve it, would represent significant progress.

The objectives that I would identify for the United Kingdom, however, are a renewed approach to nuclear non-proliferation and progress on human rights in Iran, particularly in relation to religious freedom. I have worked for many years with the small Baha'í community in my constituency, and for many years I have been a member of the all-party parliamentary group on the Baha'í faith. The persecution of the Baha'ís and the use of capital punishment in Iran are a stain on that country's reputation; and, of course, this is a moment when we should be renewing our effort to see the return of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other dual nationals.

When we have identified those objectives, the next question we should ask ourselves in this essay is "How do we achieve them?" I do not think that we can achieve them through some sort of neo-imperial lecture tour. I think it would be much more sensible for us to work with our many allies and friends in the region—to work with our friends in Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and elsewhere in the middle east. They, I suggest, would be heard much more sympathetically as interlocutors when it came to advancing those objectives.

I was grateful to the Foreign Secretary for his response to my intervention about the situation in Hong Kong. Those who were in the last Parliament will have heard me speak about the subject many times, and I make absolutely no apology for that. For several months we have seen running protests, with an escalating level of violence in all of them. Just last week the all-party parliamentary group on Hong Kong heard remarkable testimony from Dr Darren Mann of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who described his experience of arrest as a result of offering medical aid to those who had been injured while protesting against the Government. When your Government are prepared to arrest medics off the street, you realise that things have taken a serious turn for the worse.

**Catherine West:** Does the right hon. Member agree that until there is a full inquiry into police brutality, we will not really know the answers? Should not we in this House, and those in many other Parliaments, press for the facts about the police brutality in Hong Kong?

**Mr Carmichael:** The hon. Lady and I have worked on this issue in the past, so she will not be surprised to hear that I agree with her absolutely. That pressure is what is needed. It was shocking enough to hear about the arrest of medics—doctors and nurses—who were offering help to injured protesters in the streets, but the really shocking thing that we heard from Dr Mann last week was that when he took his testimony to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Committee of the Red Cross, they said, "There is not much that we can do: we have to stay neutral in this matter." You cannot stay neutral when you are faced with that sort of brutality, and when the most fundamental human rights are at stake.

We have seen China renege on the joint declaration. It is surely time for the United Kingdom to respond, and that response must go beyond the hand-wringing that we have seen so far. We have witnessed the massive concern that now exists among the Hong Kongers

about the British National (Overseas) passport scheme. It was always a messy compromise, and it was never going to be anything better than that, but I think we have reached a point at which that messy compromise is simply no longer sustainable. Surely Hong Kongers with BNO passport status should now be given the right of abode.

As I said to the Foreign Secretary, it is shocking that the global head of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, should have been denied entry to Hong Kong this weekend. That must be proof, if proof were needed, that what is going on there is something of which China is ashamed, and something on which the House should be prepared to shine the light of scrutiny, because scrutiny and accountability are what will bring the change that is needed there.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** It is a great pleasure to ask Theo Clarke to make her maiden speech.

6.35 pm

**Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con):** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege and an honour to have been elected as the Member of Parliament for Stafford.

As this is my maiden speech, I will start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Jeremy Lefroy, who was an excellent constituency MP. He was a tireless champion of local issues—including our County Hospital, which has been through difficult and tragic times—and he should be commended for fighting hard for local services. He was also a tremendous supporter of local businesses, and I want to thank him for his work in tackling youth unemployment.

I first met Jeremy nearly 10 years ago, when I volunteered with him on the Conservative party's international social action project in Sierra Leone. During his time in Parliament, he became well known for his expertise in international affairs. He was a committed member of the International Development Committee, and a prominent supporter of the UK's aid budget. He believed, as I do, in a modern, compassionate form of Conservatism. We believe that the UK should continue to lead in responding to humanitarian disasters and tackling extreme poverty. Having visited Africa with him several times, I have seen at first hand his dedication to promoting the Global Britain agenda and his commitment to eradicating malaria and neglected tropical diseases, causes that I will continue to champion in the House.

I was delighted when Jeremy became the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Ethiopia. Given that Africa is home to 16% of the world's population and that figure is set to double by 2050, investing in the economic power of these young people will be key to the success of global Britain, so I welcome the Government's upcoming Africa investment summit. I wish Jeremy well in his future endeavours, in which I am sure that he will continue to advocate for these important issues.

Stafford is rightly proud of our history. During the Dark Ages it was the centre of the kingdom of Mercia, and local legend has it that the local town of Penkridge was once the capital of England. The Ancient High House, one of the finest Tudor buildings in the country, also welcomed royalty when King Charles I stayed there

en route to Shrewsbury. May I take this opportunity, during a debate on the Queen's Speech, to invite Her Majesty to visit us in the constituency, at any time, to continue that fine tradition?

As an English literature graduate, I am delighted that my constituency has such strong literary connections. Charles Dickens stayed at the Swan Inn in the High Street, and Stafford has been home to, among others, the playwright Richard Sheridan and our former Poet Laureate Dame Carol Ann Duffy. I was amused to learn that my predecessor's ancestor, Thomas Lefroy, was the lost love of Jane Austen, on whom she based her most famous character, Mr Darcy.

Stafford is also fiercely proud of our strong connections with the armed forces. During world war two Stafford hosted multiple bases, including RAF Hixon, which was used to train bomber command units, and flew dangerous night-time raids over Europe to keep us safe and retain the freedoms that we enjoy today. We have one of the largest military bases in the country, with both the Army and the RAF Tactical Supply Wing based in my constituency. I am pleased that the Government have honoured their commitment to NATO by maintaining 2% spending on defence and have retained our nuclear deterrent, and that we will continue to support and strengthen the armed forces covenant. Veterans have risked their lives for our country, so I will always be on the side of our servicemen and women and their families. I am also pleased that this Conservative Government are undertaking the largest integrated security, defence and foreign policy review since the end of the cold war. On Remembrance Sunday I was struck by how many members of the public turned up to line the streets of Stafford in support, so I now pay tribute to everyone at the Beacon barracks for all they do. I take great pride in representing a constituency with such a strong military history.

It is an honour to represent such a beautiful part of the west midlands, including the county town of Staffordshire, and Penkridge and the villages of Acton Trussell, Bednall, Brocton, Hyde Lea, Coppenhall, the Haywoods, Hixon, Hopton, Ingestre, Milford, Tixall, Wheaton Aston, Bishopswood, Seighford, Derrington and many more. I hope to reward the faith that residents have placed in me by working hard over the next Parliament.

My constituency voted to leave so, rightly, my first priority for the people of Stafford is getting Brexit done. In my first week, I delivered on this promise by voting for the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill. I thank the constituents who lent me their vote at the last election. I will continue to fight for local services, including our County Hospital. I am committed to standing up for our wonderful national health service and in particular to ensuring that we tackle issues relating to mental health. I will also fight to ensure fairer education funding for our local schools in Staffordshire, and I was delighted that Stafford College was recently judged outstanding by Ofsted. I welcome the Prime Minister's leadership internationally to provide all girls with 12 years of quality education by 2030.

As we forge a new path outside the EU, it is vital that our farmers are supported and that we do not compromise on environmental, food and animal welfare standards in any future trade agreements. We must continue to conserve our countryside and ensure that rural communities get the infrastructure they need, from fast broadband to

[*Theo Clarke*]

improved local bus services. I have enjoyed visiting our county showground, and I look forward to my first ploughing match in the constituency, although I will need to learn to drive a tractor before then.

Stafford and Penkridge have contributed hugely to the Government's national agenda to build more houses, which is to be commended. However, when development comes along, we must also ensure that proper infrastructure is put in place. I will continue to raise the concerns of local residents over increased congestion and the provision of local schools and GP surgeries. I am also committed to working with Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council. These authorities have seen great success in delivering services despite ongoing external pressures, and they should be congratulated.

As a former small business owner, I will always bang the drum for businesses to invest in the constituency, support those seeking work and champion our local apprentices. We must maximise the trade benefits afforded to us as part of the Commonwealth. We have to take advantage of the opportunities available to us by leaving the EU in order to achieve a truly global Britain.

I believe that politics is about getting stuff done, both locally and nationally. One of my proudest achievements before being elected was bringing Sir David Attenborough to campaign in Parliament with me, and together we successfully lobbied the Secretary of State to increase funding for tackling plastic pollution. As a one nation Conservative MP, I will continue to champion the environment and the importance of conservation. I welcome the Government's new Blue Planet fund and I believe that the UK is rightly leading the global fight against climate change through hosting the COP26 in Glasgow. I am reminded of a quotation from the great American President Theodore Roosevelt, who said:

"The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."

That is a sentiment that I very much agree with.

The Queen's Speech set out this Government's ambitious international agenda. As a country that has always been a beacon for freedom and tolerance, the UK should not shirk its global responsibilities. After Brexit, we must continue to bolster our crucial international alliances and institutions, and expand the UK's diplomatic network.

I am an advocate for gender equality. I would like to thank the cross-party 50:50 Parliament campaign for its tremendous work in encouraging more women to stand for public office. I will always champion the agenda of women and girls and ensure that their voices are heard both at home and abroad. When the suffragettes marched to London through Stafford, they were met with a somewhat frosty reception in my constituency, so it gives me even greater pleasure, 100 years on, to serve alongside a record 220 female MPs in this Parliament and to be elected as the very first female MP for my constituency. Walking through Westminster Hall for the first time as the Member of Parliament for Stafford, I was reminded that beneath my feet was the broom cupboard where the brave suffragette Emily Wilding Davison hid on the night of the census, ensuring that it was recorded that a woman's place is in the House of Commons.

6.45 pm

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke). I think we have already seen and heard enough to know that she will be a credit to her constituents and to her party. I am also pleased that she paid such a kind tribute to her predecessor. However, I say to her as someone who does regular surgeries in four or five of my larger villages that if she does a surgery in every one of the villages she read out, and the ones she did not, she will be extremely busy indeed.

Before I turn to the debate proper, I want to make an observation about the speech by the hon. and gallant Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). It was a good speech, but I have two observations. The hon. and gallant Gentleman said that we would work with the European Union and the 27 countries, but have we not noticed that over the past two or three years the European Union has operated as an extremely disciplined single bloc? I think that trying to pair one or two countries off would be a fool's errand. My second observation is that in the past week or so we have heard comments from Michel Barnier that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to complete a comprehensive trade deal in 11 months. We also heard Ursula von der Leyen saying last week that the UK would have to compromise and prioritise, so I hope that the hon. and gallant Gentleman agrees that we should suggest to the Government that putting the setting of objectives first and silly timetables second might be a really good way to proceed.

**Tom Tugendhat:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. I will not address his second point—he has addressed it thoroughly enough—but on his first point, there are many areas in which we co-operate bilaterally with France. The Lancaster House and Sandhurst agreements are among many examples.

**Stewart Hosie:** Indeed, but I think the hon. Gentleman understands the point I was making, which was that we do not want to find ourselves tied to ridiculous red lines and timetables when the objectives are the key thing.

It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Gracious Speech. As with every Queen's Speech or programme for government, there are certain measures that one would welcome—not least, in the case of this Queen's Speech, the announcement of increased tax credits for research and development. I say that because innovative economies are more productive economies, and when we come to combat the inevitable decline caused by Brexit, the more innovative and productive we can be, the better. A word of caution, however: research and development tax credits are a function of corporation tax, and not every innovative or innovating company, particularly the small ones, pays corporation tax. So if we can have a little imagination from the Treasury Bench about how we support innovation in smaller companies, that would be very welcome. I also welcome the announcement that measures will be developed to tackle hostile activity by foreign states, and I hope that that builds upon some of the excellent work already done in the private and public sectors, and essentially by the National Cyber Security Centre.

Although some of the measures to tackle climate change are very welcome, particularly coming from this Government, they are described as being "world leading" when they are nothing of the kind. The sad truth is that

is a thin and poor programme for government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said when opposing the programme on the opening day of this debate, our party stands against this Government's

"cruel, punishing policies and narrow, backward-gazing politics."—*[Official Report, 19 December 2019; Vol. 669, c. 51.]*

I would go further than that. Some of the measures in the programme—such as an immigration Bill that will end in law the free movement of people—will further diminish the UK's ability to attract the best and brightest, as well as much-needed labour in other sectors, and very much risks turning the UK into an insular, reduced and backward-looking place.

Before addressing the impact that ending free movement will have on the agriculture, hospitality and care sectors, the brain drain that the UK Government's hostile environment is already causing, and the brutish logic of the Tory party—whose plans will reduce the ability of young Scots and, indeed, youngsters from throughout these islands, to live, love, work and study freely throughout Europe—we might want to consider the practical implications of trade and how those matters are related.

When Commission President von der Leyen said last week:

"Without the freedom of movement of people, you cannot have the free movement of capital, goods and services",

the Government should have listened. At a time when we need to boost trade, we should be paying attention to the damage that will be done to capital markets, the City of London and the ability to export services, all of which depend on people being able to travel freely. Given the damage that Brexit will cause to UK global trade, the UK Government should be doing everything possible to remove every conceivable obstacle to protecting and enhancing the opportunities to maintain and grow trade of all sorts—free, fair trade, with a level playing field. Instead, in spite of the clearest of warnings, yet more obstacles are being erected, this time by ending in law the free movement of people, which will further weaken and diminish the UK's ability to strike good trade deals to compensate for the losses and minimise the additional costs that Brexit will cause.

We should put a couple of numbers on this. Everybody knows that there are dozens of economic assessments of Brexit. With one exception, they are universally negative. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research provides an average assessment. We could lose perhaps 20% of total global UK trade with a bad Brexit, and that is where we are heading. If we cut a deal with all the main English-speaking economies and with all the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—we might claw back 5% or 6%. It does not take a genius to work out that we will soon run out of large countries with which to cut deals to compensate for the losses, so adding additional obstacles strikes me as making no sense.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Forecasts do not say that we will lose trade. They simply say that the rate of growth of our trade will be slower. They do not say that there will be a reduction in trade.

**Stewart Hosie**: Many assessments—I am not going to go through them—say that there will be a reduction in trade. Indeed, some assessments, as I have just said, suggest a 20% loss of total global trade. That is extraordinary.

At least this programme for government suggests that there will be a trade Bill—which, of course, we should already have had—with which comes the opportunity to table amendments. Those amendments will seek to ensure full parliamentary oversight over trade deals and that our devolved nations' Parliaments are consulted, and their consent sought, on trade deals where there is a direct impact on those countries. The amendments will also seek to ensure that, as the UK rushes headlong into any deal offered, vital public services such as the NHS are off the table, important geographical indicators are protected, and vital regional industries—national industries, in some cases—such as fishing are also protected. Many of us are old enough to remember the last time the Tories treated Scottish fishing as expendable and sold it out. We have no confidence that they will not repeat that mistake.

Those things—parliamentary scrutiny, collective working to seek real agreement with the devolved nations, and protecting the NHS and regionally important sectors—should be at the forefront of UK Ministers' minds. I fear, however, that, at best, they will be dragged kicking and screaming to make modest concessions or, worse, that the legitimate concerns of people and industries across these islands will be ignored in a headlong dash for what may be a hideous Tory-Trump deal. When I was last in the USA last year, I was repeatedly warned that the UK will be expected to put everything on the table, while the US will be expected to put nothing on the table. When the Foreign Secretary said that a US-UK deal would be win-win, I was struck by his breathtaking naivety in saying something that stands up to no scrutiny whatsoever.

**Mr Steve Baker**: Will the hon. Gentleman attribute to somebody the advice he was given? I would be very interested to know who thinks that the negotiation will be quite so asymmetric.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton)**: Order. Before the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) responds, may I remind colleagues that if we are not going to have a time limit, they need to stick to approximately 10 minutes?

**Stewart Hosie**: I will not attribute that advice—that would be completely unfair—but I assure the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) that that warning was given to me on more than one occasion.

I will take your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, and miss out from my speech a chunk on the trade Bill, which I will be able to use when it is finally published. I will say one thing, however. The UK Government have said the main elements of the trade Bill will be to

"create powers so that the UK can transition trade agreements we are party to through our membership of the EU, ensuring continuity for businesses."

So far, so good. The problem is that this Government could not even roll over, in full, the agreements we had with Norway and Switzerland. The Tory Government were unable or incapable of replicating the agreements we had with two close, relatively small, western-friendly neighbours, yet they expect that a simple piece of domestic legislation will pave the way, quickly and easily, to replicating some of the UK's larger, more complicated deals. If that is what they truly believe, we are no longer dealing with reality; we are dealing with the politics of delusion.

[Stewart Hosie]

I will end with what the Foreign Secretary said at the beginning of the debate. I think he was wrong to say that, post Brexit, the UK would have expanded global horizons. The truth is that this programme for government—including a trade Bill that may give too much power to the Executive, and an immigration Bill that will end freedom of movement—will lead to a weakened, diminished, reduced UK, with shrinking, not expanded, global horizons. We will oppose this programme for government, and the sooner we are out of this United Kingdom and this backward-looking politics, the better for us all.

6.58 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke), whom I congratulate on her uplifting, upbeat and excellent maiden speech. This is one of the most exciting moments of my career. There is so much to be positive about—better than the morose dirge we have just heard from the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie).

I view this new decade as having the potential of the 1980s. This country moved forward so much during that decade. Given the economic policies we have had to put in place over the past 10 years, at least we start this decade in strong economic circumstances and there is so much we can exploit. I honestly think that this will be the decade of reward. This will be the decade of change, and this decade will make us lead around the world in the 21st century. We are moving towards a high-tech, high-wage, high-growth, high-productivity economy. We are not there at the moment, but this Queen's Speech and what has been laid out in the programme for government show that, with the policies the Prime Minister wants to take forward, those things can be achieved. They can be achieved in this first term, and they can be achieved not least because we have economic strength behind us to take things forward.

Today's debate has rightly focused on some of the key foreign affairs and defence issues that relate to our place in the world and how we operate, and I will come on to discuss a couple of them. However, we must also look at the United Kingdom, our place in the world, and what we can achieve. Our infrastructure plans, which I will touch on later, are an important part of how we will achieve things. The 2020s will be the decade of healing and growth in all areas, from defence to infrastructure to the economy and democracy.

Turning to democracy and our place in the world, during the past five years, and even since the general election, we have heard from people who want to ignore democratic outcomes. This general election more than any other showed that, above all else, the British people are democrats. I was struck from the moment we had the vote on Europe in 2016 that those who voted remain felt, on the whole, that the decision should be honoured. They might not have liked the result, but they felt that the decision should be honoured because people are fundamentally democratic.

There has been a habit—this is not just about the Brexit debate—to ignore democratic results across the world. Look at the backlash in this country against the election

of President Trump—democratically elected in one of our closest allies. Look at the behaviour of the previous Speaker, who rolled out the red carpet for dictators and autocrats, and then refused entry to the democratically elected leader of our closest ally in NATO. It was a disgraceful and small-minded activity that again played into ignoring democratic outcomes. If we are to lead the world and have a place in the world, we must respect democracy. That must be No. 1. Whether or not we like the outcomes, we must respect democracy, but that respect has sadly been lacking in so many ways, mainly led by the Opposition Benches.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an extremely important point. Does he agree that much of the frightening rise of extremist elements, particularly in France and the Netherlands, can be traced back to how the Governments of the 1990s ignored clear decisions that their electorates had taken in referenda, particularly around Europe?

**Alec Shelbrooke**: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. His point is just as relevant today. In fact, we are seeing a rise of extremist parties across Europe. Whether it be Vox in Spain or the Swedish Democrats, all these people come from questionable pasts. This is all based on the fact that populaces feel that their national Governments are not taking notice of their demands.

Brexit was a pressure valve for us in many ways. It allowed people who felt ignored to vent their fury at where they thought things were going without having to move to extreme parties, and we in this country should be grateful for that. The reality is that we have just had an election in which extremist views were rejected. The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition threatened to shut down elements of the press if he did not like what they were doing. He released a video in which he said, "Change is coming. You will all be sorry." That was unacceptable and undemocratic. We may not like what the press say all the time, but we cannot have a free and open society unless we have a free and open press. If we disagree with what is in the press, it is up to us to argue why it is wrong and to prove our point.

I am being careful about the time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I must say that it is all very well for the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) to criticise this Government's relationships with partners around the world and to draw on Yemen, but not once did I hear her lay any of the blame at the Iranian regime that has been arming the Houthi rebels, launching missiles into Riyadh and using deliberately provocative terms. Given all the events of the past week, the lack of willingness to come out against the Iranians and what they have been up to shows that Labour may be able to change its leader but, in the words of The Who,

"Meet the new boss,  
Same as the old boss."

Moving on to defence, freedom is important, and we must ensure that we can defend it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) said, deterrents are equally as important and, as I said to the Secretary of State for Defence last week about the possibility of a NATO-led maritime force in the strait of Hormuz to act as a deterrent rather than as a

reaction to an attack, we must ensure that we have the ability to react to such things. When the defence review comes up, I will make no apology for saying that we must have another proper look at the Royal Navy. It was a mistake to deliver only six of the 12 destroyers. In fact, the other six destroyers would not have cost half as much to make as the original six, because it was all in the programme. We have a good frigate programme, but we need more. We should be looking at more minesweepers, which are flexible and versatile ships that can be used either to patrol our waters or to help in problem areas.

Lots of people criticised the amount of money spent on the aircraft carriers, but I will be controversial and say that I would have another one. Frankly, the ability to have aircraft platforms in several different areas is important because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East said—I always appreciate his in-depth work—we do not know where the threats will come from. What we do know, however, is that if we cannot react or work against such things, we may allow them to spin out of control because we do not have the counterbalances or the deterrents.

I agree with Dominic Cummings when he says that there is a major problem in procurement in the Ministry of Defence. We read only this weekend that the Trident replacement is already £1.3 billion over budget. How does that happen? How can we possibly try to build up our armed forces and build more ships when a project that is hardly under way is already over budget by billions? There must be a fundamental review. We must also work out how we are going to man all these ships and how we will recruit. It is all very well building ships, but we have a recruitment problem, and recruitment has always been hard during times of full employment.

I will briefly mention infrastructure, because it is important and will help cement our place in the world. If we want to have a high-tech economy, we must build for it. We have to ensure that fibre broadband goes in. We have to work on transport solutions. We must be honest and say that if a solution does not look like it is going to deliver what it should deliver or if the price is going up, there must be other ways to deliver that solution. I still want HS2 to come to my city of Leeds, because it will be vital. However, whether it does that by going to Manchester and then looping into HS3, I am open to suggestions. At the moment, I am finding it hard to see how the price tag, which is almost double what we were led to believe, can deliver the benefits we are looking for, especially when there are other ways, given the Prime Minister's agenda, that it can be delivered to my city of Leeds.

I am an optimist, and I am very excited about the one nation agenda that is being put forward in this Queen's Speech. I honestly believe that the reason why this will be a fantastic decade is the strength of the one nation agenda. We will not be talking about the roaring '20s; we will look back at this period as the start of the roaring 21st century.

7.8 pm

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to add my voice to this important debate, and it has been a pleasure to hear new Members giving their maiden speeches. I worked with the hon. Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke) before she took her place in this

House, and I look forward to working with her again and to being an advocate for the Department for International Development. The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) spoke about her constituency, which is 25 miles away from Edmonton, so maybe I can join in on one of her pub crawls and bring some of my constituents.

It is safe to say that this will be a crucial Parliament for Britain's role in the world. It is much more than the question of whether and how we leave the European Union; it is about who we are. It is about the fork in the road that we face. Does Britain want to become a mean, introspective, protectionist island that clings on only to the imagined greatness of some past empire that was powered by racism and exploitation, or does Britain want to become a beacon in the modern world for global justice, for international human rights and for tackling climate change, inequality and the refugee crisis?

Alongside the Government's legislative programme, there are important points of policy. The UK must continue to spend 0.7% of its gross national income on international development priorities. In fact, I hope this Parliament may, in due course, debate increasing it to 1% to free up extra funding for climate finance to help the global south survive the climate emergency.

So, too, must the UK protect the independence of its world-class Department for International Development. The Department must not become subservient to another, and we must end the civil service recruitment freeze to bring in badly needed staff to manage the aid budget properly.

This debate is also about what Britain chooses to stand for; it is about Britain's politics. The world is increasingly polarised. On one side sit Putin, Orbán, Modi, Bolsonaro, Trump and the rest of Steve Bannon's dream of a fragmented new world order. On their side, they reject the rules, the international law and the universal human rights that have taken decades for the world to establish. On their side, Trump takes the world backwards on climate change and women's reproductive rights. He decrees invasions on Twitter and insults the world's poorest for living in what he calls "shithole countries."

Theirs is the side of engineered chaos, of injustice and of ever-widening inequality, but on the other side stand hope and an international order that is strong and stable, and that could even begin to become fair. Imagine a new economics that could work for the planet and the people, and a world that actually brings people together to solve our biggest challenges, such as inequality and the climate breakdown.

That is the side the UK must pick each and every time, but I and many other Opposition Members are worried that the current Government will just keep picking the wrong side. The truth is that what we saw of the current Government in the last Parliament is a Prime Minister who has already made his choice, which is to take his place in Steve Bannon's new world order. As this new Parliament commences, it will be up to us in this House to chart a better way forward for Britain, whether inside or outside the European Union.

I end my speech by making three simple pleas to Members on both sides of the House: first, that we do not let the Prime Minister and his extremist faction take Britain off the cliff; secondly, that we do not let the

[Kate Osamor]

Prime Minister side with dictators and populists when it comes to the crunch; and, thirdly, that we do not let the Prime Minister pick the wrong side of history. Instead, let us all hold him to account by consistently speaking up for global justice throughout this Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** It is a great pleasure to call Imran Ahmad Khan to make his maiden speech.

7.14 pm

**Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con):** It is with great pleasure and some humility that I rise to make this, my maiden speech. I have found the House to be a welcoming place that I am proud to be part of. Over the past month, I have at times been awestruck by the kindness, helpfulness and near encyclopaedic knowledge of the wonderful staff who serve this place and whom I find to be this Palace's greatest treasure trove.

I especially wish to thank my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Mrs Jenkyns), and her team, who have been a great support to me over the past two months. I wish to say what a pleasure it is to be part of such a vibrant and dynamic pack of Yorkshire MPs. Indeed my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), came and helped me a great deal. He contested Wakefield in his infancy, and he gave me a lot of advice and, indeed, shoe leather.

Speaking of shoe leather, I am mindful of all those who have graced this green leather, and have confidence that we will step up and meet the challenges promised by this privilege of public service. I am also aware of the energy and emotion that this House and the people whom it serves have invested in the Brexit debate. The underlying theme of unleashing our United Kingdom's potential to innovate, adapt, overcome and triumph is not lost in the character of my constituency of Wakefield.

As Britain does indeed renew and consolidate her place in the world, I cannot think of anywhere else more important to be than here, helping that happen now. Britain has still to

“Play up! play up! and play the game!”,

improving the world and enhancing our place in it.

As an Ahmadi Muslim belonging to a peace-loving minority community that suffers vicious persecution, discrimination and oppression in many parts of the world, I see perhaps more clearly than most the deep and enduring importance of core British values such as compassion, tolerance and fairness, especially at a time when those values are perceived as under threat in many parts of our world. We must continue to be a beacon of thoughtful, respected and innovative thinking born of years of accumulated learning and practice.

Before I launch into the rich history of Wakefield, one with which my own family story is intertwined, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor. In 2005 Mary Creagh became the first woman elected to represent Wakefield, a tenure that was to last for 14 years. I am not sure if the House is aware, but before Mary and I first met, she propelled me to new heights—approximately 13,000 feet. On a bright November morning last year,

after reading Mary's comments in *The Yorkshire Post* about her incoming Tory opponent being parachuted in, I put the protestations of my friends and family aside and performed a parachute jump. This had not been on any bucket list of mine, but it definitely got the adrenalin flowing, so thank you, Mary.

Later that day, with my feet firmly on the ground, I met Mary for the first time. We were both appearing on a BBC Radio Leeds drivetime debate, and I turned up still resplendent in my true blue jumpsuit. Mary accepted it with good grace, and during this first encounter set out her stall as a calm, concise and experienced advocate.

That first meeting was in one of Wakefield's many good schools: Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. It was QEGS where my eldest brother went to school, and it is the arch rival of my own alma mater, Silcoates. QEGS is an independent school that has actively championed and supported its local state sector rivals, including the outstanding Pontefract College, and was a willing participant in the assisted places scheme. As the radio programme came to an end, the pupils in the audience immediately gravitated towards Mary. This was an example of the interest and affection that many constituents in Wakefield have for her.

I, like Mary, contend with a hearing impairment, something she referenced in her own maiden speech. Wakefield has within its dynamic business community a company that is currently accessing research funding to investigate tinnitus, a hearing condition for which there are more than a million GP referrals each year. This project has multiple international partners, including industry, government and academia.

I would also like to pay special tribute to Mary's time and contribution while working on overseas aid and development. This resonates with me a lot owing to my previous work at the United Nations and elsewhere abroad. Our overseas aid and development is testament to British compassion, and it can be leveraged as a powerful agent for, and a real measure of, Britain's reach and influence around the world. Mary was a public servant, and I hope she is able to continue her work in other places. Wakefield is fortunate to have had such a worthy Member of Parliament.

Having concluded my comments about my predecessor, may I direct the thoughts of the House to the sad news of the death of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos of Oman? Through the Sultan, Oman has been an ally of Britain since 1970. In a part of the world where there are definite fault lines, his kingdom looked to us for guidance and friendship. In return, Oman has been a friend to Britain, and I hope it will continue to represent the greater aspects of the United Kingdom's place in the world.

I was born in Wakefield. I attended school in Wakefield. My late father, a dermatologist, practised medicine in Wakefield, spending his entire working life in the NHS. That led to him meeting my mother, a nurse at Wakefield's Pinderfields Hospital. My nana was a night sister there. It is fair to say that I quite literally owe my entire existence to the NHS and to Wakefield. I feel the warm glow of history when I tell the House that, according to my mother, my grandfather Wilfred Benjamin Reynolds was the Boys' Brigade leader for the father of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett). I look forward to working with my constituency neighbour and having

meetings with him, although I do not expect that we will be wearing shorts, playing conkers or drinking cocoa around the campfire.

Since gaining city status in 1888, Wakefield has many claims to fame. The cruise-ship loving singer Jane McDonald and the 1980s band Black Lace hail from Wakefield. Many Members may have danced to one of their memorable singalong songs such as “Agadoo” at a wedding party. [*Laughter.*] Clearly, I have.

Edward the Confessor had an estate in Wakefield, hundreds of years after it was first settled by the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. In J. S. Fletcher’s “Nooks & Corners of Yorkshire”—a very good read—he describes Wakefield as the principal town along the banks of the Calder, and it has figured in history to no small extent. Indeed, it is just over 560 years ago to the day, on 30 December 1460, that Richard Neville, Duke of York, and his son Thomas met their deaths at the battle of Wakefield. The Lancastrians, led by Lord Clifford, defeated the Yorkists, only to suffer a major reverse months later in Britain’s bloodiest battle, at Towton, a site just down the road. Wakefield became yet another battlefield almost 200 years later, during the English civil war, when the parliamentary forces fought an engagement with the royalists. Although I now find myself a parliamentarian, Madam Deputy Speaker, I confess to you to always having sympathised, in the round, with Cavaliers.

According to an old English ballad, Wakefield can claim fame as the location for some of Robin Hood’s shenanigans. It was at Stanley, later part of Wakefield’s deep historical roots in the coalmining industry, that Robin and his band of freebooters had their infamous encounter with the pinder of Wakefield. The pinder was a nominated townsman of Wakefield who went toe to toe with Robin and his merry men after they goaded him by trespassing with stray animals on Wakefield land. Robin was so impressed by the pinder’s nerve and prowess that he invited him to join his outlaw band. This may be a legend, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it aptly captures some of the characteristics of the proud, honest and plain-speaking constituents of Wakefield, and their continued willingness to fight for their rights. I humbly submit that when you come to visit our city, Madam Deputy Speaker, you keep your flock of geese under control—or perhaps even consider leaving them at home.

The Wakefield area is the traditional home of the headquarters of West Yorkshire police, one of Britain’s largest police forces. West Yorkshire police, with their regional, national and international partners, have played a major role in counter-terrorism policing since the 7/7 attacks of 2005. The former assistant chief constable, John Parkinson, was an early leader of the then North East Counter Terrorism Unit and a thought leader in formulating and codifying the Contest strategy, a key framework in UK counter-terrorism practice, keeping our communities safe and countering the radicalisation of the vulnerable. For the United Kingdom and her status in the world, in terms of capability, those police represent the very best, alongside our gallant armed forces, superb intelligence agencies and our universally admired diplomats. These capabilities are respected and studied by a broad base of our international partners involved in the evolving, ongoing fight against terrorism and organised crime.

Other famous people from Wakefield include John Radcliffe, founder of the Radcliffe library in Oxford, and Richard Fleming, founder of Lincoln College, Oxford,

so Wakefield has a link to education. It is at this point that I wish to highlight a large number of young people in my constituency for whom equality of opportunity needs to be made real—more than just fine-sounding words. There are still too many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are not in employment, education or training. I look forward to working with Her Majesty’s dynamic Government and, whenever they are willing, those on the Opposition Benches to support the creation of new jobs and opportunities to improve the lives of people who deserve more attention and greater fairness than they have had in the past. This will not come just by saturating our northern towns and cities facing similar circumstances with concrete, cranes and portakabins; it will come by delivering excellent education and training. The self-esteem that comes from earning the contents of a pay packet lifts people up and in turn brings the aspiration of owning a home.

I have already mentioned the company that is investigating a treatment framework for tinnitus, but my constituency and the wider business community has within it other companies involved heavily in fields that may surprise some Members. There is a company working on supercomputer-generated models for predicting adverse weather patterns. After the recent flooding in our region, my constituency neighbours the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) may well welcome the positive outcomes of this work. There are also companies that are pioneering and improving new methods of high-tech manufacturing and recycling harmful plastics. I want to see these companies thrive, not only with their spirit of innovation but by employing skilled young people born and educated in the local area. Throughout my campaign, I heard the voices of hard-working parents who want the best for the most important thing in their lives: their children. I want to help to carry the torch, already lit by the individuals and organisations in my constituency, to foster confidence, aspiration and achievement.

When Members of this House have need of a tranquil place for quiet reflection in which to think about their choices—maybe for leadership—and decide, I would recommend a visit to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, a real gem not only of my constituency but of God’s own country. There they may find peace of mind and enhanced perspective while appreciating the beautiful sculptures of Barbara Hepworth, Antony Gormley and Henry Moore.

There is one further individual I would like to mention—a great patriotic son of Yorkshire and a true servant of Wakefield who, when asked in this place to speak for England, lent his voice and vote to the fight against tyranny: the right hon. Arthur Greenwood. Until the recent election, the last Conservative to be returned to this place by the people of Wakefield was a surgeon called George Hillman, in 1931. Sadly, Hillman died that same year, and in the ensuing election of ’32, Arthur Greenwood was elected. That started a continuous chain of Labour representation for Wakefield here, broken only one month ago today.

My predecessor Arthur was the MP for Wakefield during the second world war. He served in the war Cabinet, where he played a decisive role. In 1940, when Europe and east Asia were smouldering and the only guns left sounding in defiant support of freedom were British, there existed a plurality of voices in this Cabinet

[*Imran Ahmad Khan*]

of five: those with Churchill and the continued prosecution of the war, and others who thought that Britain was too weak and diminished to go it alone in the world. It was this camp, which wished to sue Hitler's inhuman project for peace, that seemed to have the numbers in Cabinet. Faced with surrendering to the most villainous and malevolent powers, it was the deciding vote from Greenwood—and, indeed, therefore Wakefield—that sided with Churchill and informed the nation and our enemies that Britain would never surrender.

The rest, as they say, is history. However, history sometimes provides parallels, and when faced again with the prospect of capitulation, in the spirit of Arthur Greenwood much of what had been taken for granted as the traditional Labour vote up and down the country came out and entrusted a Conservative Prime Minister once again not to bend, bow or buckle. I will do my best, as will, I am certain, my newly elected hon. Friends, not only from across Yorkshire and the north but from all parts of our United Kingdom, to vindicate and honour all those who have lent us their vote.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not drawing a direct connection with the past, if you will excuse a brief comment on the substantial subject of this debate. For too long now, Britain's role in the world has trended towards reactive and indecisive. I am sad to say that in too many corners of the world that I have visited or have lived in, there is greater esteem for the UK than sits within some of this country's own commentariat and policymakers. With a governmental majority and the confidence of the British people behind us, we must now turn our attention to restoring pride and purpose in our foreign policy. As my predecessor Greenwood knew, it is sometimes necessary to take decisive action and then summon all the strength of purpose the nation can muster to deliver that decision. We will not always please every country and every court of opinion, but we should recall that in this country's rich history of foreign affairs runs a proud theme of making the world a better place. We should take heart and be emboldened by this overwhelmingly positive legacy and continue to fight for the freedom of people everywhere to live and worship as they please. We can only realise this if we are strong, confident and outgoing. To succeed, we must take wise and informed decisions and have the vision and dynamism to lead. That is what the people of Wakefield and, indeed, the majority of all the nations of this great country expect of us. I know that we can rise to that once again.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you and Members present for listening to this maiden speech of mine. I owe my sincere thanks to the people of Wakefield, whom I am proud to serve. I seek a purposeful and confident future for our United Kingdom wherein people's hopes and aspirations are realised and great achievements recorded—a future as brilliant as our past is glorious.

7.32 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan) on his very comprehensive speech. However, I have to say that he failed to mention the famous Wakefield Trinity rugby league team. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you, like me, noticed that. As the Member for Wood Green, I know that the London

Skolars rugby league club is in Wood Green and may well one day meet Trinity, which is, of course, a very famous rugby league team. In replacing the outgoing Member for Wakefield, the hon. Gentleman has very large shoes to fill. I look forward to further, perhaps shorter, interventions to learn more about him.

We know that good foreign policy is underpinned by three basic pillars of security, trade and human rights. In my remarks today, which will be quite short, I will set out why I believe that the UK's departure from the European Union could, in geopolitical terms, weaken our role, our influence and our position in the world. Hopefully, that will only be for the short term, but it will certainly be for the foreseeable future.

World peace and the UK's security rely on a series of strong relationships and networks that can assert a dominant position so that aggressive forces can be held in check. Belonging to the EU provides a non-military network of friends and allies to rely on in tough times. Modern defence issues are as much about shared databases as traditional notions of bombs and guns. Leaving European agreements on security undermines a well-tested system of keeping us safe. Brexit puts at real risk the joint approaches with European systems to ensure cyber-security and the sharing of intelligence. It also undermines the European arrest warrant. Abandoning our leadership role in European affairs could fragment a very strong and assertive voice in defence, such as in discussions on cyber-security, in shared counter-terror tools and in wider questions of weapons proliferation.

Increasingly, climate change also presents insecurity on a global scale. This year, the UK could become a true leader on the climate crisis, with Glasgow hosting the COP26 climate summit in November—I hope it will be more conclusive than the Madrid meeting—following closely on Labour's push for this House to become the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency. It is a real pleasure to hear Members from across the House promoting the role that the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association play in developing that role for parliamentarians.

Although the UK has a good policy platform at the level of UK missions abroad—for example, promoting measures to mitigate climate change—this priority could be at risk if a free trade agreement demands some other priority.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On that point about climate change and international trade, the UK is hosting the COP26 conference in Glasgow in November this year. Is that not an opportunity to assert how climate change should be at the heart of our international trade policy?

**Catherine West**: Indeed, that is the case. As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I have seen that, when one visits certain missions abroad, there is a good policy understanding among our diplomats. However, that is sometimes not necessarily reflected in this House, and we must work much harder to ensure that we have our Ministers talking about the subject and promoting it much more themselves.

Secondly, good foreign policy relies on a vibrant domestic economy and a realistic trade policy, providing a positive financial context in which to play a leadership role abroad. Instead, Brexit provides years of uncertainty,

which will harm long-term economic growth and a sense of buoyancy in our economy while consigning our economic importance to that of a middling nation.

The past decade has already seen anaemic growth in the domestic economy as a result of the disastrous policy of austerity and the self-inflicted wounds of Brexit. Just today, in the financial pages, there is much discussion about another rate cap by the Bank of England because of fears of another dip in our economy. Households are worse off now than they were in 2010—10 years ago. Simultaneously, there is a real risk that UK trade policy could erode standards on our trade in goods and lead to a diminishing of the ease of trading in services owing to the ridiculously short adjustment period that the Government have given themselves to achieve equivalence in financial services. The amount of political capital in energy required to negotiate a free trade agreement with the EU and the unrealistic timeframe of 11 months will mean that the UK is likely to reduce its influence in other crucial international relations issues.

Finally, membership of the European Union has, to date, provided a strong front to promote values and norms in international relations, including a robust approach to promoting human rights. The UK was instrumental in designing a strong framework of protecting human rights, as it was the first nation to ratify the Council of Europe's convention on human rights in war-ravaged Europe in 1949. The convention commits each signatory—each nation that signs up to it—to abide by certain standards of behaviour and protect the basic rights and freedoms of ordinary people. The treaty aims to protect the rule of law and promote democracy. The EU institutions in practice have performed an important function to maintain human rights dialogue with large trade partners, such as China, Japan and Turkey. Let us take, for example, trade relationships with Turkey. How will the UK be able to hold Turkey to account on its treatment, for example, of the Kurdish and Alevi communities, when trying at the same time to forge a trade deal and possibly to selling them even more arms than we do now? On the case of China, how can we have those honest discussions with that giant nation around the issues of Xinjiang province, Hong Kong and Taiwan, when, at the same time, we desperately want to promote our trade arrangements with them?

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making such an important point. Was she as perturbed as I was last week by reports that No. 10 adviser Tim Montgomerie suggested that there was a spiritual connection between this current Government and the country of Viktor Orbán? This direction of illiberalism will cut very much into the heart of the human rights that she has described.

**Catherine West**: Indeed. The shadow Foreign Secretary made the point that the Queen's Speech is sufficiently vague in its wording that anything is possible. I think that is perhaps where some of us have a concern. We need to hear the exact detail of the policy proposals so that we can better understand what direction we are actually travelling in.

After Brexit, the UK will lose much of its leverage during trade talks, as concessions will need to be made now that we are not part of the EU. Britain's role in a post-Brexit world is yet to be determined, and the Queen's Speech does not go into nearly enough detail in

setting that out. There are of course opportunities in an ever-evolving world, where emerging markets may present light at the end of a Brexit tunnel, but there are real risks in fragmenting our long-term defence and security relationships with the European member states—that basis of friendship. The trade picture is one of uncertainty and promises of jam tomorrow, against a backdrop of a coasting domestic economy. Leaving the predictable family of the European Union will make the promotion of human rights and ethical foreign policy doubly difficult, and in my view will go down in history as a gross mistake and an act of national self-harm.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton)**: It is with great pleasure that I call Alicia Kearns to make her maiden speech.

7.40 pm

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to make my first speech in this House, in this debate on a most consequential Queen's Speech. It has been an honour to be present in this great Chamber today to hear the contributions of parliamentary veterans and new recruits alike. I can only hope to emulate them.

The mystical beauty of Rutland and Melton stretches from the vale of Belvoir in the north, down towards Rutland Water and the delights borrowed from the district of Harborough; I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) is not here, so I can talk about stealing from him. The natural landscape is adorned with the architectural majesties of many beautiful market towns.

We are proud of our role in feeding the nation, with arable, dairy, sheep, pig, poultry and even bison farmers, who for generations past—and generations to come—have ensured that food quality, animal welfare and environmental conservation are paramount to their trade. Towards the centre of the constituency is the rural capital of food: Melton Mowbray of pork pie fame. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I can promise the House that we will hear much of the pork pie over the next few years. We can also boast that we are home to not just one, but two geographically protected delicacies, which are, to repeat: the famous Melton Mowbray pork pie and Stilton cheese. Although agriculture is our chief activity, there is also light industry. Members will be particularly interested to hear of Clipsham quarry at the constituency's eastern edge, for when Parliament was undergoing restoration work in the previous century, it was from here that the stone was supplied.

Unfortunately, however, my constituency has had a precarious history, and its beauty and rural spirit have not always proved a sufficient defence against the palace courtiers and planners in London, who since at least the 12th century have thought Rutland a foolish accident. It is, I think, little coincidence that the year that the county was absorbed into Leicestershire—despite fervent local protest—was the year after the UK joined the European Community. The eternal tension between county and city was played out on a larger scale as a Community became a Union, and perhaps we have come to learn from both episodes that identities are important at all levels. Cosmopolitan and parochial world views can co-exist, as long as there is respect between the two. Now, back to Melton.

[Alicia Kearns]

It was in the Leicestershire part of my constituency, of pork pie fame, that I was interested to discover that the phrase “paint the town red” originated. In 1837, an eccentric aristocrat by the name of Henry de La Poer Beresford—I will not claim that he is necessarily related to my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford)—turned up at the gates of Melton with his, shall we say, over-refreshed band of friends and refused to pay the toll gate fee to enter the town. They then happened upon a pot of paint—red paint—and proceeded to apply a fresh coat to every doorstep on the high street. Personally, I was rather afraid that Momentum, who besieged the constituency during the election, would do the exact same thing, but fortunately we were spared.

I thank the people of Rutland and Melton for putting their trust in me, for I trust the collective wisdom of the people to choose what is appropriate for them at any given time, and it is for all of us here to guard against complacency. It is in this spirit that I hope my service will be characterised. As significant powers return to this Parliament, our roles as constituency MPs have never been more important, and it is the silent victories that will define my time as an MP: to secure new housing for a constituent; to resolve an issue dividing a family; to fix a failure in the system; or to restore strength and stability to a community. It is in our constituents’ darkest moments, when they have nowhere else left to turn, that it becomes our duty to give a voice to the voiceless and to speak of the unspeakable so that no one suffers in silence.

The people of Rutland and Melton have had an excellent advocate in Sir Alan Duncan. He served his constituents for 27 years, and I plan to be here just as long. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Sir Alan served his constituents with great diligence and care, his party’s Front Bench with consummate political skill, and his country with distinction. In his maiden remarks, he lamented that Rutland had been abolished as a county in 1974. Now, thanks to his efforts, it has regained its own postcode and become a unitary authority again, and I wear its badge with pride; but not to fear those from Leicestershire, I also wear that badge. I salute Sir Alan’s courage in being the first openly gay Conservative MP and I am proud that our party is home to all.

It is fitting that I have been given the opportunity to make my maiden remarks in a debate on Britain’s place in the world. As International Development Minister, then as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and finally as Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan was a steady hand for our allies and all those engaged in our foreign policy. He has helped to ensure that Britain remains the foremost voice in the world for parliamentary democracy, fundamental liberties and a free economy.

This Queen’s Speech demonstrates that the Government understand the threats our nation faces and that the nature of warfare has fundamentally changed. It is no longer a story of traditional military conflict—a set battle space in which infantry, artillery, ships, boats and planes fight it out to the last man standing. The battle is now fully hybrid in nature. By that, I mean the sustained and persistent strategic deployment of all potential instruments of influence: economic, informational, military, cultural, cyber, diplomatic, criminal and civil society.

Hybrid warfare is not necessarily a factor in an overt or declared war; it is now deployed concurrently in peacetime and wartime. Crucially, the actors are occluded, since the most effective enemy is the one who deploys forces against us without us even realising that we are under attack or in conflict. That means that the threats we now face are from states that behave like terrorists, terrorists who behave like states, and individuals who can effect as much damage as previously only states and well-funded groups were thought capable. Hybrid warfare is no longer an esoteric afterthought, rather the whole lens through which our defences and diplomatic efforts should be assessed during the foreign policy, defence and security review we rightly propose to deliver. We must recognise that to protect ourselves, we must bolster and defend all levels of our society, not just military infrastructure and capabilities. We must recognise that to defeat our enemies, we will have to possess truly hybrid offensive and defensive capabilities ourselves.

For nearly 1,000 years, Rutland’s motto has been “multum in parvo” or “much in little”. The same could be said for this great country. It is not through vastness that we have become a beacon in the world, but rather the commercial talent of our citizens, the power of our ideas, and the strength of our democracy and laws, which by unapologetic defence, have stood the test of time. Lest I be accused of already trying to attract the attention of the Prime Minister with the use of classical phrases—if it works, that is not a problem—there is a Greek aphorism that complements the Latin: “gnōthi seauton”, meaning “know thyself”. This has always been a sound basis for British foreign policy. More than ever now, in a world of hybrid warfare, we must be temperate where possible and decisive where necessary. These phrases, “much in little” and “know thyself”, will guide me to serve the good people of Rutland and Melton and to achieve those silent victories.

7.49 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): What a fine first outing for the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns)! The former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee did warn me that she was one to look out for. She will not have seen what I could see, which was his career slipping away before him. I have no idea why Ministers on the Treasury Bench are laughing at that, because the same could be said for them. It was in many ways the perfect maiden speech. It contained humour in great serving, it had a generous tribute to her predecessor—a story of whom I will tell her, but not in this House—and just enough steel to show that she is indeed a voice to be reckoned with. She did well, and I wish her well in her parliamentary career.

It would be remiss of me not to also mention the hon. Members for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), for Stafford (Theo Clarke) and for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan)—he certainly has a future in reading audio books, for sure. I had not realised that he was going to start that tonight, mind you, but it was a fine outing that he had as well.

The title of this debate is “Britain in the World”. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) said in his opening salvo, Britain in the world is not our project. We wish it well—Britain in the world matters to us—but our project is to maintain Scotland’s place in Europe. Scotland, as well as being an independent

European country, will be the greatest ally of and closest partner and friend to the rest of the United Kingdom once it has restored its independence.

As others have sought to do, I want to adumbrate the context in which this debate is taking place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) said, there is certainly, I hate to say it—no matter how myopic and rose-tinted the lenses of Conservative Members—a receding Britain offering itself out to the world. That can be seen no more than in its exit from the European Union and the way in which that is happening. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling, I can accept that the Government now have a mandate to press ahead with Brexit, but it is an arithmetical fact that that mandate does not stand in Scotland, and it is our job to make that case. I plead with the Government, with their huge new majority, to abide by what he mentioned, which is to always understand that one's opponent might well have a point. Despite the Government's majority, there should be no monopoly on wisdom. Freedom of movement is one of the greatest diplomatic instruments ever to have underpinned peace on the continent of Europe, and departing from it will be a huge crime to future generations. I plead with those Conservative Members who believe in it to please stand up for it within their own forums.

We have heard much talk about the need for the United Kingdom to start playing a proper and more serious role in the United Nations Security Council, which is one of the instruments of the international order that are supposed to underpin peace across the globe but have been rendered utterly meaningless by events over the past few years—largely, it has to be said, because of the actions of Russia, which is now pretty much the only vote that matters in the Security Council. I want to hear from the Government exactly how they plan to deal with that in the upcoming integrated review. There are already discussions and ideas being advanced at a European level, not least by President Macron. I do not agree with everything he says, but he can sometimes bring forward uncomfortable truths and interesting solutions to counter them, perhaps with a European-style model.

We have, of course, an unpredictable man in the White House—more unpredictable than anyone who has gone before. We have a gangster in the Kremlin who has redrawn the borders of a sovereign European nation by force—the first time that has happened since the second world war. Let us be honest: the world has largely allowed that to happen, and what has gone on in Ukraine has gone unnoticed. In fact, what is happening—this is why I pressed the Secretary of State on it earlier—is that the Kremlin is being rewarded for its actions in Ukraine by dint of the fact that Nord Stream 2 will go ahead. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton mentioned hybrid warfare. What do we think Nord Stream 2 is if not an instrument of Putin's hybrid warfare? We shall reap what we sow. When her predecessor used to stand at the Dispatch Box or respond on behalf of the Government in Westminster Hall, he would tell me and tell the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Ukraine, that Nord Stream 2 was largely nothing to do with the United Kingdom's interests. I am quite confident that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton will take a different view, and I wish her luck in advancing it if she does.

As was mentioned in an intervention on the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), a new kind of political gangsterism is rearing its head—yes, on the continent of Europe, but in other parts of the world as well. I would be interested to see in the integrated review how the Government plan to get the balance right. Of course we would expect Britain to advance its interests and seek to get good things where they are good, but how do they balance that with having the tough conversations that need to be had? I have to be honest: the score sheet does not look too good from where I am standing. We now have a situation where the Government are becoming more and more relaxed on, for example, Huawei. Why on earth would we go ahead and invite this virus into the security apparatus here in the United Kingdom? The United States Government—I cannot believe I am saying this—are right on Nord Stream 2 and right on Huawei, and the UK Government are getting it all wrong.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling mentioned the report on Russian action in this country to subvert democracy and much else. That report has been concealed for entirely political reasons. We do not need to wait for Select Committees to be up and running. The Intelligence and Security Committee is not a normal Select Committee of the House—it exists by statute—so the Government could get on with this and get that report published, as should have happened before the election.

I want briefly to focus my remarks on Ukraine. I declare an interest of sorts in that I am to receive the presidential state honour—I have forgotten the name of the award—from the President of Ukraine, President Zelensky. I have not received it yet, so I am putting that out there just in case I do have to declare it. Ukraine weeps for its sons and daughters every night as, yes, hybrid warfare but also a physical war takes place on its territory. The right hon. Member for Maldon and I have visited the same parts of eastern Ukraine. We have maintained strong relations and even friendships with politicians there who want to see that war coming to an end. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling rightly said, we are not short of platitudes in this House, but I think it can honestly be said that 25 years after the signing of the Budapest memorandum, that document now stands as utterly unfit for purpose. I do not blame the UK Government for that—I do not blame any of the signatories for it—but it does need to be debated. I hope that when I table such a debate, I will find allies around the House so that we can discuss it properly. It is about not just eastern Ukraine but what is happening in Crimea, where Crimean Tatars continue to be subjected to persecution and anyone who flies the Ukrainian flag will find themselves very swiftly in a Russian prison.

Funding continues to dominate as a huge issue for the Ministry of Defence. I was amazed to hear the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke)—I am not sure whether he is still in his place—suddenly realise that procurement is a massive issue. Anyone who has attended a defence debate in this Chamber will know that this has been getting discussed since long before I turned up in this place five years ago. As the former Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), mentioned, the last mini review that took place had attached to it a requirement that it be fiscally neutral. It sounds to me as though that will not be the case this time round, and if that is so, it is welcome.

[*Stewart Malcolm McDonald*]

In the last Parliament, I pressed the then Minister of State, the former Member for Aberconwy, on the Government getting serious about the fact that the Ministry of Defence bleeds money as though it is going out of fashion. It is very simple: Governments carry out a threat assessment. Governments then look at what they need to meet the challenges in that threat assessment and fund what they need to. That is where we can get into a proper discussion on multi-year defence agreements. If the small Scandinavian countries can manage this—if they can take the political heat out of defence funding and provide some stability to their armed forces—surely, with the collective imagination that exists here, we should be able to do the same.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making, as he always does, a measured and thoughtful contribution to the debate. Reform of procurement across Government has bedevilled successive Administrations. Leaving the European Union provides an opportunity to look afresh at that, and I hope I might suggest through him that it is an urgent priority for Government to look again at this and to do it better, not only in the Ministry of Defence but across all Departments.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a not entirely unfair point. It does not recruit me to the aim of leaving the European Union, although in fairness I do not think he was trying to. I accept what he says about other Departments, but the idea that procurement laws in the European Union have somehow hampered the Ministry of Defence is clearly nonsense. We only have to look at the example of the fleet solid support ships. All the Government had to do, as other European Governments have done, was to designate them as warships, and then they could have announced that the ships would be built here, giving jobs to shipyards around the United Kingdom.

The MOD needs to stop privatising where it does not have to. Why on earth do we have to privatise, for example, the defence fire and rescue service? When on earth are we going to get to grips with giving proper terms and conditions to the Ministry of Defence police, treating them properly and rewarding them properly for defending critical state infrastructure?

It is good to see you in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Government's defence programme this time round will be different from the last two Parliaments—we will actually have some defence legislation. We will have legislation coming forward on vexatious claims, which Opposition Members will scrutinise line by line. We will be judicious and dispassionate, and we will want to get that right. Indeed, the Minister for Defence People and Veterans and I had an exchange on these affairs last week.

There will also be updates to the armed forces covenant, which we welcome and want to see implemented properly. We also want to see better terms and conditions for members of the armed forces. We will continue to make the case for the armed forces to have a proper representative body similar to the Police Federation, as is normal in other NATO countries—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (**Andrew Bowie**)

can chunter away from a sedentary position if he likes, but I have yet to hear a sensible argument from him in the time that he has been here on how we improve those terms and conditions. I am happy to let him intervene.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I was not seeking to intervene; I apologise.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Okay. Sometimes interventions are best made on one's feet, as opposed to from one's seat.

Lastly—this was partly the subject of my Adjournment debate last week—it is time that we took seriously the woeful lack of democratic oversight of special forces in this country. Nobody wants to see flexibility reduced. Nobody wants to see the ability of the Government and the armed forces to respond to threats be diminished. Only a fool would advance such an argument. But other countries manage this—the United States of America managed this, and I do not think that its President feels particularly inflexible at the moment.

I plead with Government Members, some of whom I know to be thoughtful on this issue and similar ones—one of them is smiling at me right now—let us have that discussion, and let us have it properly. The United Kingdom lags behind many of its own allies when it comes to democratic oversight of special forces, and it would be a good thing for the Government to seek to end that in a fair, judicious and transparent fashion that still allows security to be taken seriously, but also ensures that the oversight that is lacking is there to give public confidence in our special forces and the rest of the armed forces.

8.4 pm

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): This is no time for timidity. This is a time for boldness in purposeful action. That is why I was so delighted to hear the maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (**Alicia Kearns**), who hardly mentioned pork pies. She spoke with courage, drama, wit, insight and dedication to her electors, and I was delighted to be here for her speech. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (**Imran Ahmad Khan**) made a brilliant and charming speech, eloquently calling for strength, confidence and for us to be outgoing.

For about 50 years, the UK Government have been operating in the world within what became the European Union. That has had a profound effect on our outlook as politicians, people who commentate on politics and, indeed, people who make policy within officialdom. It is a major global event that the UK is emerging from the European Union in trade policy, security policy, diplomacy and a wide range of areas.

I am absolutely clear what kind of relationship we should negotiate with the European Union: it is the one in the political declaration on the future relationship, and I am proud of it. I am proud that this Government have set it out. It is broad and deep. I wish that it were more widely read. I, of course, take for granted that everyone in the House has read it, but it should be more widely read across the country, because if it were, many fears would be allayed. We have heard, for example, about Erasmus. Of course, the European Union would like us to continue sending our young people all across Europe, and I would like them to be able to go. But in

negotiating that broad and deep relationship with our great friends in Europe, it is time to change the dynamic. We desperately need to get up off our knees, end what I would describe as a timid Eurocentrism and start looking out seriously to the whole world, so I was delighted to listen to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier.

I want to encourage the Government to start with trade, because all our ambitions are founded on a strong economy. It is the promises in our manifesto on trade that we must keep first. We have said, for example:

“We aim to have 80 per cent of UK trade covered by free trade agreements within the next three years, starting with the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.”

I take it, though it is not in the manifesto, that that means acceding to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, in order to do those trade deals with Japan, Australia and New Zealand. I am excited about that prospect, because I think that the United Kingdom, in emerging into this trading system, will be able to set a new standard for the world. It will be able to broaden that Pacific rim trade deal to be a new platform for the world, while doing important bilateral deals with the European Union and the USA.

I particularly want to encourage the Government to prioritise the United States of America. It is the biggest economy in the world. Only today, the US ambassador and the Secretary of State for International Trade met, and they have been tweeting about what a successful meeting it was. The United States shares our belief in liberty—the freedom to succeed. It instinctively understands that progress comes through trial and error. That is why we must reject regulatory harmonisation, because I am afraid that it is in regulators as much as it is in entrepreneurial activity that mistakes are made. We do not want to be harmonised if we are going to make rapid progress for the benefit of all people, and especially the poorest—the people who cannot game these enormous regulatory systems.

I encourage the Government to immediately begin negotiating with the United States of America on 3 February, the first working day we are out of the European Union. In doing so, we will break the myth that we have to harmonise with one system or the other. Through mutual recognition and equivalence, we will be able to set out our own path. If we look at the United States negotiating mandate, all it is asking us to do on food, for example, as I understand it, is in effect to just keep to our WTO obligations, which are science-led. Of course, we will have our own requirements in the UK for what food we accept, but I am absolutely clear that American food is good food. We will have concerns about animal welfare standards and costs of production, but we should be clear that we are behaving in the public interest and trying to raise the living standards of the poorest—indeed, to enable everyone to flourish—through adopting, with the United States, a fundamental belief in liberty under the rule of law.

That is the fundamental thing we need to believe in as we leave the EU: boldly rediscovering our sense of self-government, our sense of liberty and our sense of service to other people, while championing justice around the world, as Palmerston said—not becoming some Quixote tilting at windmills, but standing up for our values in a way that we can all be proud of. I want to urge on the Government boldness, not timidity—no longer focusing in that Eurocentric way on the EU and no longer being subordinate to the idea that whatever

the Commission says is definitively true, but instead standing up as an independent nation and talking first to our US allies and negotiating with them a fantastic free trade agreement that can stand right alongside our EU free trade agreement as part of that broad partnership, and also our accession to that Trans-Pacific Partnership. If we do all of those things—it is a hard ask, but life is tough—my goodness, what a nation we will be, and we will completely defuse the great siren songs of despair that we have heard from Opposition Members. I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench every possible success, and I am sure that Conservative Members will do everything to ensure that this nation succeeds.

8.11 pm

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I think we should give credit where it is due, so I welcome the Government's action on global health, particularly in addressing malaria and Ebola. The Government, campaigners in these sectors and our own health sector deserve a thumbs up for this vital work. I think the Foreign Secretary was right to emphasise these cross-party priorities today.

However, Blaenau Gwent needed three things in the Queen's Speech: a plan for good jobs, better transport in our eastern valleys and action on public health. Unfortunately, the Queen's Speech failed—failed—to deliver any of these. There is a Bill to protect pension schemes, and nearly 400,000 people have transferred out of pension schemes since the Government brought in what they called pension freedoms. But, at the same time, we have seen a significant increase in poor transfer advice and pensions scams that are costing people £4 billion a year, so it is important that this legislation ensures tough action against rogue financial advisers.

There is so much potential in my constituency of Blaenau Gwent. There are major firms such as Thales, which is setting up a new digital centre in Ebbw Vale. There are leading manufacturers such as Continental Teves, and excellent institutions such as Coleg Gwent, which is developing a cyber-security hub to train young people in this thriving sector. But we need the right support from the Government to help unlock this further. That is why we need a proper industrial strategy to create good, well-paid jobs for the future, with commitments like Labour's pledge to build a new gigafactory producing electric car batteries in South Wales.

Secondly, many people in Blaenau Gwent need reliable public transport to access jobs in Cardiff. That is why we need prompt funding from the new shared prosperity fund to improve the Ebbw Vale to Cardiff train line. However, more than two and a half years since the fund was promised, we still have only vague details of how this will work and we have no real timeframe.

Finally, Blaenau Gwent has real public health challenges that need addressing. Locally, groups such as the Sole Sisters in Cwm and Parc Bryn Bach running club in Tredegar have really stepped up and are doing incredible work to help people improve their mental and physical health. But at a UK level, we still do not have, for example, a junk food advertising ban. As recent work by Richard Layard has shown, improving people's mental health and wellbeing can save billions of pounds.

We need to celebrate excellent community groups and reinforce the work that they do by putting effective policies in place, so when it came to what Blaenau Gwent needed, what we got was a disappointment—

[Nick Smith]

reheated announcements and half-baked proposals, dressed up with some warm words. The Queen's Speech Blaenau Gwent actually needed was a Labour programme, such as investing £250 billion in infrastructure to create jobs and strong action on public health. The election is over, but this Queen's Speech has confirmed that Blaenau Gwent and our country need a Labour Government now more than ever, and I will continue to fight for this.

8.14 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is wonderful to see you back in the Chair. We are all thrilled to have you back in your rightful position.

I would like to commend all those who have made their maiden speeches today, particularly the ones I have just heard from my new hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan) and for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns). They have both left the Chamber, but in their absence I would like to commend them for their passion for their constituencies, but also for their patriotism for their country. That is why we are here—because we love our country and believe in what is right for Britain. That is why we are here to stand up for our country.

Today, I can say with great pride that the British people can be confident that Her Majesty's Government and this House will now uphold the democratic instruction they were given on 23 June 2016 to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union, along with all of its political entanglements. Once again, we can stand tall in the world, knowing the future destiny of our island nation is now back in the hands of the British people themselves. No longer will we be a supplicant to a higher European authority, with our freedom and right of self-government being restored as a truly sovereign and independent nation.

As you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, the British people have a deep attachment to and a love for the basic concept of freedom. We have always been a free people; our forebears fought for and defended that over many centuries. Those who believed that it did not matter and that the people would not notice if our freedom was traded away underestimated the lion-hearted spirit of the British people. This Gracious Speech lays the foundations for, I believe, a brighter future, with our nation led by a Prime Minister who truly believes in this country and will stop at nothing to see us succeed and play an ever increasing role in the wider world.

Yes, Britain is back: back as a global free trading nation, with an independent trade policy, making new alliances and renewing those that we have neglected over the mistaken period of political union with Europe; back on the international stage, taking our place in global organisations, speaking up for British interests and co-operating with our wider Commonwealth family of nations; and back as a force for good in the world, with the most professional armed forces and security services of any nation, while at the same time providing support for the poorer nations of the world and those in need of relief from natural disaster, as well as promoting democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

We have a proud history, but our island story continues, with greater things to come as we regain our place in the world. The title of this debate, "Britain in the World",

says exactly where we as a nation have always been and must continue to be. In passing the withdrawal agreement Bill, this House has already delivered on our promise to get Brexit done, and we will be leaving the European Union in less than three weeks' time. The British people understood that the world is much more than Europe, and our future must be global rather than tied to a political union that is essentially representing the interests of Germany and France. Britain's role in the world has been and always will be much greater than that of a continental power. Britain is a country with a global history and global connections, and once we leave the EU on 31 January, we can once again play an independent role in foreign affairs on the world stage.

We must have a post-Brexit foreign policy that takes into account Britain's unique history, as well as its present reality and future aims. We must not allow questions over the future relationship with Europe to dominate foreign policy thinking over this entire Parliament. The key areas of focus must be a new free trade agreement with both Europe and the United States of America, as many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, and there must be a renewed focus on the Commonwealth, most especially Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with whom we must forge a much closer relationship with the aim of creating a new CANZUK alliance. The CANZUK nations share so much in common, tied together by language, a common heritage, the same common-law legal system, a love of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which began in 1215 with Magna Carta, and by sharing Her Majesty the Queen as our sovereign. That is not the case for the United States of America of course, but from speaking to many Americans, as I do, Mr Deputy Speaker—and you will know this only too well—one might be forgiven for thinking that our Queen is as much their Queen too; Americans seem to love and adore the British royal family, so I think we can share them with the United States if it would like to do so.

**Sir John Hayes:** My hon. Friend is making a bold and confident case for our relationship with the Queen's realm, and I wonder if, in the spirit of Joseph Chamberlain, he might recommend to the Government some preferential trading arrangements with those countries of the realm; it seems to me that that would be a way of cementing our economic ties and complementing our political ones.

**Andrew Rosindell:** My right hon. Friend interjected at just the right point, because I was about to talk about the importance of trade and co-operation with all of Her Majesty's realms, of which there are 15 apart from the United Kingdom, but he will also not be surprised to hear me referring to the 21 cherished British overseas territories and Crown dependencies, which are part of our wider British family in what I would describe as an all-encompassing Britannic Kingdom; from the Falkland Islands to the Isle of Man, from Bermuda to the Pitcairn Islands, the British family stretches far and wide and all are part of our global family which we must defend and cherish, and include in any future free trade agreements.

Over the coming years, our nation, our Government and our people must work tirelessly to bring about this transformation, putting Britain back where we belong, as a global free-trading nation, to create the wealth and prosperity we need to make our nation stronger and to

give our people the best chances and opportunities for the future. Getting this right will not be plain sailing—we understand that—but with ambition, determination and the kind of leadership demonstrated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister we will be able to revitalise our foreign policy and put the UK firmly back on the world stage.

That is a far cry from the days when British embassies were being shut down across the world—I remember that in the 1990s and during the period of Mr Blair's premiership—only to be replaced by EU external action missions, and when British Foreign Secretaries stopped visiting our closest friends like Australia and New Zealand, and when the Commonwealth was sidelined by the then Government. And—I make no apologies for referring to this—in that period our overseas territories were shamefully treated as bargaining chips in EU negotiations, as happened with the Labour Government's attempted joint sovereignty proposals over Gibraltar with Madrid in 2002. What a shameful action and betrayal of the people of Gibraltar that was; what a sad period that was for British foreign policy. It felt like we were in retreat—well, not anymore.

Our Prime Minister, just like his magnificent and courageous predecessor Margaret Thatcher, will reinvigorate our international relations and Britain's standing in the world. After three years of muddle caused by a Parliament that refused to accept the democratic will of the nation, not before time we now have the leadership we need to take Britain forward.

Britain is a great nation—a founding member of the UN and a permanent member of the Security Council. We are the sixth largest economy in the world. We are a leading member of NATO and the Five Eyes security alliance, plus a range of other organisations, which I will not refer to now. Those who have sought to downplay Britain over the past few years were on the wrong side of history, and today we must all—yes, all of us—be proud to support a confident, independent foreign policy that reflects Britain's true place in the world.

Our Prime Minister has already shown us just how much can be achieved if we demonstrate self-belief and confidence; as we approach the next stage of negotiating a free trade agreement with the EU we must have a clear and unflinching vision, and tough negotiators who will not crumble at the first hint of dissent from Brussels. That vision should look like a comprehensive free trade agreement, which ensures that Britain maintains its close economic relationship while never preventing us from diverging if we choose to do so. And leaving the EU must mean that we are completely free: the EU tentacles must be cut away fully so that we can make our own way in the world once again.

At the end of the day, we must all be prepared to walk away if, as happened before, the EU treat us not as an equal partner but as a supplicant; otherwise, as the last three years have shown, the EU will try to land us with a poor agreement or a bad deal, and nobody is willing to accept that now, least of all the British people, who voted overwhelmingly to get Brexit done and take Britain forward in a new direction. By taking a confident approach, setting out clear proposals and keeping the threat of no deal on the table, I believe our Prime Minister will secure a free trade agreement which will benefit both the United Kingdom and retain friendly co-operation with the nations of Europe.

But our foreign policy has to look beyond Europe. Though anchored to Europe by geography, Britain is unbounded in its global ambition, and we must engage our friends on a global scale. And what better way to develop global connections than by rebuilding our long-neglected ties with the Commonwealth, a diverse worldwide network of 53 countries, which together make up a third of the earth's population. Our exit from the EU means that we can take full advantage of the economic opportunities of the Commonwealth. We can have our own independent trade policy and strike trade deals across the globe without being limited by the lengthy process of EU ratification. We can strike bilateral trade deals based on mutual benefit without handing over political powers which no proud sovereign nation should ever do.

Defence and security, the protection of our global environment and wildlife, climate change, tax evasion and immigration are all areas where Britain should take an active role in the Commonwealth and work together with our historical allies to form dynamic arrangements fit for the modern world.

As Britain exits the archaic protectionist structures of the European Union, it must once again reclaim its place as a global leader for free trade. Britain used to account for more than half the world's trade and free trade is in our blood. We must make the development of free trade networks a British Government priority once again, and I believe that under this Government we will.

Britain also retains huge soft power and influence across the globe, which we can use to our advantage. The English language is the language of the world, and our historic institutions, such as the monarchy and our parliamentary democracy, are universally recognised. The emerging markets in Latin America, the far east and Africa are places where Britain must be in the future. As one of the Prime Minister's trade envoys representing the UK to Tanzania, I believe that these are vast markets that we can develop in the years ahead as we leave, rightly, the EU customs union. Those markets of the future present massive opportunities for British businesses to export goods and services, as well as the potential for lower prices for all our constituents and consumers across Britain. We must ensure that our new trade policy takes full advantage of the opportunities presented by Brexit, and that we get on with negotiating and striking new free trade agreements as quickly as possible, perhaps starting with the USA on 1 February.

We are now in a post-Brexit age. The title of this debate, "Britain in the World", serves as an effective reminder that Britain is now no longer just in Europe, but part of a much wider global community. We must refocus how we think and act, to benefit from all the advantages of our new-found independence. That means our foreign policy must be about far more than our relationship with Europe. We must set out a truly global foreign policy from this day forth, with the Commonwealth and global free trade at its heart, underpinned by friendly co-operation between independent sovereign nations. The British people will expect nothing less.

8.30 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is during debates like this that I am sure everybody across the House feels a great sense of pride

[Andrew Bowie]

in our country, our island nation, our United Kingdom of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland: open and internationalist but of course united, in which Scotland, of course, has played its full part and will do, I predict, for many, many years to come. Together we can achieve much more than we could apart; together as one nation, together with our allies and partners around the globe.

Today, we have heard some excellent maiden speeches. I was reminded by the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary who is sadly not in her place, that the foreign affairs day of the 2017 Queen's Speech debate was the day that the now Prime Minister was responding as Foreign Secretary. I remember it well, as that was the day that I gave my maiden speech. I am sure it lives long in the memory, especially for the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). I therefore had to take issue with some of what the right hon. Lady said and remember the prescience of some of the then Foreign Secretary's predictions. I believe it was on that evening that the now Prime Minister predicted that this country would be leaving the European Union with a deal. And so on one of the biggest foreign affairs issues of our time, the Prime Minister predicted exactly correctly.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** He was two years out!

**Andrew Bowie:** He may have been two years out, but we got there eventually.

The United Kingdom is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a founder member of NATO, a member of the Commonwealth and is the EU's closest friend and ally. No one country is better positioned to influence the world for the better than the United Kingdom. We have a proud history in this regard. As we leave the European Union, we have the opportunity to mould a new, ambitious and long-term foreign policy with a moral compass and direction. I use the phrase "moral compass" because I believe that more than any other country Britain has a record to be proud of in terms of using its influence overseas and its clout for good. The Government's 2017 humanitarian reform policy was designed to uphold the UK's commitment to international humanitarian refugee and human rights law, and the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The Government's conflict stability and security fund also facilitates Whitehall Departments to work together on national security priorities such as helping to train and equip the Syria civil defence, known as the White Helmets, to carry out humanitarian operations during the Syrian civil war. The Government estimate that that has saved more than 85,000 lives during that bloody conflict.

The UK is one of only six countries to meet its OECD commitment to spending 0.7% of its gross national income on international aid and it was the first of the G7 countries to meet that commitment. I believe our development budget, especially during international humanitarian crises, is a crucial part of securing Britain's place in the world and building a truly global Britain. However, there are occasions where aid spending and non-military humanitarian assistance are simply not enough to defend human rights and prevent morally intolerable levels of suffering. That is why I was so

supportive of the decision in 2018 to authorise the RAF to participate in co-ordinated targeted strikes, along with our French and American allies, to degrade the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their further use in the conflict. We are one of very few countries in the world capable of taking such action. That we did so was important not only because it sent a signal that we would not stand idly by as chemical weapons were used on innocent civilians, but because it signalled our intent to remain and our determination to retain a globally deployable, flexible military, working with our allies to defend our values and interests across the globe.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I want to take the hon. Gentleman back to that discussion because, if he remembers, the thrust of the reason why we opposed the action at the time was that it was, in and of itself, a reaction. It was not underpinned by any long-term plan, of which there has still been none forthcoming from the Government or elsewhere. Does he lament that, as I do, and does he think that it is time that we had, essentially, a modern-day Marshall plan to resolve the conflict in Syria?

**Andrew Bowie:** I lament that so many thousands of Syrians have lost their lives in a pointless and needless conflict, in which we should have intervened many, many years ago when we had the chance to make a difference in the region. I lament the lack of a long-term strategy in the west for dealing with what is going on in Syria, but, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, I am also very proud of the action that our pilots and the Royal Air Force have taken alongside allies to deter Bashar al-Assad from using such heinous weapons against his people—innocent civilians who have been caught up in this conflict.

**Bob Seely:** I know that we have said this before, but will my hon. Friend pay tribute to the work of James Le Mesurier, the western head of the White Helmets, who died recently? James was an acquaintance; his wife Emma was a good friend of mine. They had a wonderful wedding a few years ago in Turkey that I was privileged to attend, and I am so sorry that he died a few months ago.

**Andrew Bowie:** I am very glad to associate myself with my hon. Friend's words. I am sure that everybody in the House laments the passing of James Le Mesurier. He will be greatly missed not just for what he achieved in Syria, but for what he demonstrated to the rest of the world was possible through the work of the White Helmets in that area, and around the world.

I am pleased that the Government have committed to spending the NATO minimum of 2% of GDP on defence. I am also pleased that we are committed to renewing our nuclear deterrent—our ultimate safety net—and I am proud of its being based in Scotland. I am delighted that the Scottish-built carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, are both in the hands of the Royal Navy, and that we now have operational F-35s capable of being deployed on them. The Type 26 and Type 31e programmes, also being built in Scotland, are encouraging and exciting, but it was only two years ago that the Royal Navy was nearly stripped of its amphibious assault capability, which was retained solely through the hard work and vocal interventions of Members of the House.

Rumours still swirl that one of our two new aircraft carriers might be mothballed or even sold to save money. We simply do not have enough ships on our own to safely protect these two amazing assets if they are both at the sea at the same time while carrying out other vital jobs that are required of a globally deployable Navy. That leads to a manpower problem, with fewer sailors being expected to do more, and then, of course, there is the retention problem that we have at present in the senior service. Defence is expensive. A navy is expensive—that there is no doubt. There is also no doubt that there are pressures on the Treasury, but it is essential that we get defence right and that we spend appropriately on it.

In 1963, the arguments of President de Gaulle, who is not often quoted in this place, for vetoing British membership of the European Union were based on the fact that we were a maritime trading nation. That has not changed: 95% of all imports to this country come by sea. Our reliance on freedom of navigation and open seas has not changed and, if anything, it is increasing. The importance of the Strait of Hormuz was thrust into the limelight only last August with the taking of the *Stena Impero* by an increasingly belligerent Iran. It is a fact that 35% of the world's seaborne oil shipments and 20% of the oil traded worldwide pass through the narrow straits between Oman and Iran. Our ability to deploy royal naval assets in the form of two Type 23s to protect British shipping in the region is welcome, but it is a timely reminder to everyone that we cannot afford to become sea-blind—that it remains, as is etched across the front of Britannia Royal Naval College, “upon the Navy” that

“the safety, honour, and welfare of this realm do chiefly depend”. I know that the Government get it and I hope that we will see a commitment in the months and years ahead to maintaining a Royal Navy of a size and flexibility that will defend our interests and those of our allies, continue to protect freedom of navigation on the high seas and provide humanitarian relief to crisis-struck regions across the world. For what better example and what greater demonstration is there of this country's commitment to humanitarianism, internationalism, free trade and the rule of law than a strong, globally deployable and flexible Royal Navy?

8.39 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie)—the true voice of Scotland in this House.

This is the first time I have had the opportunity to address the House since the general election, and I would like to thank the people of Harrow East for electing me for the fourth time, once again with an increased vote share—this time 54.4%—and a majority of 8,170, which in London terms is quite a windfall, I can assure hon. Members. The election result was very clear. In my constituency, the 2016 referendum result was 50:50 between leave and remain, but the people of Harrow East split into three portions. The Brexiteers said, “Why haven't you delivered it?” The people who voted remain said, “We don't want it”, but most of them said, “We accept the democratic will of the people—get on and deliver it”. I promised that if we got a working majority I would support the Government to deliver on Brexit, and I am delighted that just last week we delivered on the first measure in the Gracious Speech.

My constituency is one of great religious adherence: 75% of the population at the last census said that religion was an important part of their lives, as against the UK average of 25%. I have 24 churches, including the only Greek Orthodox church built in this country for 100 years; three synagogues; two Jain temples and one more being assembled; I have a Buddhist centre across the road; a Sikh centre across the road; an Islamic centre; and a Sri Lankan mosque. I can truly say that we have representatives from every country in the world and every religion on the planet and that every language under the sun is spoken in my constituency. Naturally, then, I have to be involved in every single area of world policy, which is one reason why I was keen to speak in this debate.

As we leave the EU and set out our stall as a world player, it is important that we remember and unite not only with the United States—that has been mentioned—but with our Commonwealth partners in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. One thing that has struck me as I have gone around the world either on holiday or on trips, is that the people of New Zealand, Canada and Australia all say the same thing: “Why did you turn your backs on us and become Eurocentric?” We now need to look outwards—not pull up the drawbridge but look internationally and reunite with those countries.

Today, however, I want to concentrate more on the new Commonwealth—namely our relations with India and other countries on the Indian subcontinent. Already, even before trying to do a trade deal with India, India is the third-biggest investor in the UK and we are the third-biggest in India, so we start from a strong base. India has been trying to do a trade deal with the EU for more than 22 years, without success, so I hope that the Department for International Trade will take up the opportunity to increase trade and investment with India very quickly. I was delighted when the Prime Minister confirmed that we would not get involved in matters sovereign to India, so when we talk about Jammu and Kashmir, we must understand that it is a matter of internal affairs for India—and actually the illegal occupation of Kashmir by Pakistan should end immediately, in my view.

We also need to encourage students from India to come to this country to be educated and then to return to India so that we enhance our understanding and capability across the world. Far too often now, Indian students would prefer to go to the United States, Australia or other parts of the world. The UK is no longer their No. 1 choice. We need to restore that position straightaway.

In our manifesto, we mentioned three places in the world where conflict needed to be dealt with. In Sri Lanka still, many years after the bloody civil war ended, those in power are alleged to have committed war crimes. It is time that we called those people out and called them to account, so that peace and tranquillity can be restored to that country and all the peoples of Sri Lanka can live in peace and harmony.

We must also mention the plight of the Rohingya, which I do not believe has been referred to in this evening's debate so far. In Bangladesh, there are 1.5 million Rohingya refugees, whose living conditions are not so dreadful now, because the people of Bangladesh have helped them. We must do our bit, through our international aid budget, to ease the plight of the Rohingya and enable them to return home to Myanmar safely and securely.

[*Bob Blackman*]

We also mentioned Cyprus, another country divided, this time by an illegal invasion by Turkey. It is time that we took to the international stage and demanded that those differences be resolved and Cyprus be reunited as one country. We have a specific interest in Cyprus because of our long history there and because of our airbases, which are important to the security of this country.

I turn to our relations with Israel, which has the 10th biggest economy in the world and some superb science, and where we have opportunities for even greater trade. I am delighted that we will ensure that local authorities attempting to boycott Israel will be denied the right to do so. It is absolutely wrong that public bodies should attempt, in some shape or form, to boycott democracies, particularly the only true democracy in the middle east. It is in our long-term security interests to form a security alliance not only with the United States, Canada and Australia, but with India, Israel and France, so that we can secure the free world.

**Mr Steve Baker:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful case, but I cannot help wondering whether, in calling for that alliance, he wants to use the United Nations. If he does, how does he reconcile the United Nations resolutions relating to Kashmir with what he said earlier about Kashmir?

**Bob Blackman:** My hon. Friend and I have shared platforms before on this issue. I look forward to the United Nations resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir being observed to the letter, and the first resolution said that Pakistan should end its illegal occupation of Kashmir. Once that is done, we can look forward to the demilitarisation of Jammu and Kashmir and the restoration of security for the entirety of that great princely state.

I want to mention a couple of other things while I am on my feet. We have discussed Iran today in an urgent question, but it is quite clear that we should be supporting the National Council of Resistance of Iran, in order to lead to regime change in Iran, and we should see the restoration of Maryam Rajavi as the President of Iran. I was at university when the Shah of Iran fled and the new regime came in. I remember that there was lots of optimism, but now the suppression of human rights and the export of terrorism across the world by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has to be called to account. We need to see regime change and people given the opportunity to restore the previous position.

Finally, on some domestic issues, I am disappointed to see no mention in the Gracious Speech of removing caste as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. Its inclusion is unnecessary, divisive and ill-informed. The measure was introduced under the last Labour Government, and we have made various promises, at various times, to remove it. Now we have a majority in this House, we should take that opportunity. This measure affects people from the Indian subcontinent regardless of their religion, and it has been very divisive. We have had the consultation; it is now time to remove it.

We also need to think about a number of housing and community issues. Getting the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on to the statute book was one of my proudest moments as a Member of Parliament. The Act enabled tens of thousands of people who were threatened with

homelessness to get help, so that they were not forced to sleep rough. Far too many people are still forced to sleep rough on our streets, and that is a national scandal that we must resolve.

I look forward to the abolition of the Vagrancy Act, which has existed since 1824. It is time we removed it from the statute book and replaced it with proper provisions to help people to put a roof over their heads, rather than arresting those people and putting them in prison cells just because they have nowhere to live. I will push strongly for Housing First to become a policy to help homeless people put that roof over their heads, but also to give them a level of support and ensure that, under the Homelessness Reduction Act, if local authorities are failing to do their duty, we use the statutory means to force them to do so. We put that in the Act quite deliberately—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who was a Minister at the time, is sitting on the Front Bench—and I think that it may be time for the Secretary of State to consider imposing those measures on local authorities that have failed to carry out their duty.

Let me end by congratulating you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on being elected to the Chair. As for those who are making their maiden speeches, let me tell them about the occasion on which I made my own maiden speech. On the first day I sat through the whole debate, only to be told at 9.30 pm, “Very sorry, but time has run out and you cannot make your speech.” On the second day I sat through the debate again, only to be told, “Sorry, but you cannot make your maiden speech.” Only on the third day did I manage to do so, by which time the subject of the debate had moved on to some area of Home Office policy. I had thrown away my original speech, so I made my maiden speech without notes. I subsequently received a complimentary message from the Prime Minister, saying, “What an excellent maiden speech, all made without any notes!” Little did he know the reason why there were no notes. Anyway, I congratulate those who have made their maiden speeches, and also those who will make theirs over the next few days.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** A maiden speech—Rob Roberts.

8.52 pm

**Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour to follow such a distinguished and well-respected parliamentarian as the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in making my first contribution in the House.

Let me begin by paying tribute to those who have gone before me in making their maiden speeches: the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), who I thought was outstanding, my hon. Friends the Members for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond), for Stafford (Theo Clarke) and for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan), and my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), whose constituency apparently does a good line in pies. Let me also briefly congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on his impending award from Ukraine, which I am sure is well deserved.

The theme of today’s debate is Britain’s place in the world. Notwithstanding the doom and gloom that we heard from the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart

Hosie)—who, unfortunately, has left the Chamber—Britain's place is assuredly more exciting, more prosperous and more forward-looking than it has been for a generation. Last Thursday, the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill passed through this House, and made its way down the corridor to the other place as the next step in the process to respect the democratic mandate of the British people, not only in the 2016 referendum but in last month's election.

However, having thought briefly about Britain's place in the world, I have thought a little more widely about Wales's place in Britain. It may have escaped your attention, Mr Deputy Speaker, but there are one or two more Welsh Conservative Members here than there were before. We have come a long way since the days of Owain Glyndŵr, when we used to burn down the houses of the English to drive them out of our fair country. In the 1390s, it was said that the Welsh were revolting! I have never heard such a thing. There is no chance of that description now. Apart from, potentially, my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), we will never be described as revolting again. We are a happy and cheerful bunch of Welsh MPs, who are committed wholeheartedly to Wales and its rightful place in a strong, prosperous and, above all, unified United Kingdom.

In this maiden speech, I thought it might be helpful to point out for colleagues some of the features of Delyn, which was constructed as a parliamentary constituency in 1983 and represented in this place by a Conservative, Mr Keith Raffan. He supported the attempt to oust Mrs Thatcher by Anthony Meyer in 1989 and, indeed, the one by Lord Heseltine the following year. It is important to point out for the benefit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and those on the Front Bench that it will not be the policy of Delyn Conservative MPs to attempt to overthrow their leader. That having been said, it might have been welcome if my immediate predecessor had done us all a favour and attempted to overthrow his.

Speaking of my immediate predecessor, I must turn now to the right hon. David Hanson. As I have spoken to new colleagues in this place, the amount of people who have said the same things has been notable. They have expressed surprise at my being here in the first place, which I have not taken in a bad way, or as a slight on my abilities. It is more about the respect and admiration that people across the House had for David. It has been an interesting path. I have heard many people on these Benches tell me about the difficult times they had during the election and the animosity that was on display during the campaign, but I can honestly say that David Hanson conducted himself with the utmost respect and integrity throughout the whole process. I take my hat off to him.

Everyone on both sides of the House keeps telling me that David was one of our best. I bumped into the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) just before Christmas. She very kindly held open a door for me, and when I explained who I was, she was very welcoming. When I said that I was from Delyn, she said, "Oh, I liked David. He was one of our best." I felt compelled to apologise, but she said, "No, not at all. It's just politics. We all understand the risks." Exactly the same words were used by David on that night one month ago.

I can honestly say that David's departure from this place was not in any way down to any shortcoming on his part. On the doorstep during the campaign, I heard the same three messages over and over. The first was that we should get Brexit done, and we are making progress on that. The second was, "I've voted Labour all my life but never again, and certainly not with the current leadership." I heard that a lot, and on that point, I am a big believer that strong government requires a strong Opposition, so I would urge Labour Members to pay heed to that particular point. The third point was, "David Hanson has been an excellent constituency MP." People said it over and over again, and I can only hope that I am able, over time, to gain the same respect from my constituents that he had. I will certainly be giving it my best efforts. I am sure that every Member across the House will wish him every success in whatever he finds himself doing in the next chapter of his life.

I read through David's maiden speech from 27 years ago, and it was a very interesting read. I picked up a couple of points. Most significant was the support that he received from his family during the process, and it is important to mention that I feel exactly the same way, despite my 15-year-old daughter being horrified when her school friends kept saying, "Your dad's face is everywhere!" That was a huge embarrassment. She was mortified, so I consider that my work as a parent is done. I am sure I can speak for everyone across the House when I say that it would be significantly more difficult for us all to be in this place without supportive husbands, wives and partners. I pay tribute not only to mine but to all those who allow us the freedom to come to this magical place to try to improve the lives of our constituents. We are forever in their debt.

It is also interesting to note that in his maiden speech, David made reference to improvements that were required to the railway lines that run through my constituency. Such improvements are still needed 27 years down the line. I will be looking closely at the current situation in Delyn and seeking meetings with the relevant Ministers to see what we can do to improve the infrastructure and boost the local economy, as well as lobbying for our share of the love with the Beeching project.

Later on in his speech, David described how there were six Conservative MPs across the whole of Wales. What a difference three decades makes! Finally, the people of Wales are coming around to the realisation that if they want to effect real change for the better in their lives, if they want to be empowered, uplifted and thrive in society, this is the party for them. I urge everyone across my beautiful homeland to remember that when the elections for the Senedd take place next May. The Conservatives are the true party of the workers and, indeed, the party best placed to look after Wales's interests.

When Mr Hanson's speech concluded, he was followed by a sprightly young fellow who at the time was the Member of Parliament for Basildon. I looked very hard through his speech, but I could find no mention at all by the now hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) of Basildon being made a city. Basildon's loss has undoubtedly been Southend's gain.

To return to the present day, Delyn is made of the three main towns of Flint, Holywell and my hometown of Mold, along with more than 30 villages in a mainly rural society. Farming therefore plays a key part in

[Rob Roberts]

constituency life, and I look forward to working with the local farming community to help them to continue to provide the lifeblood of our economic and, indeed, nutritional needs.

We also have significant factories and light industry locally, particularly Airbus, Kimberly-Clark and Kingspan. Some 1,500 of my constituents are employed by Airbus in the neighbouring constituency of Alyn and Deeside. I look forward to working with it and other local organisations to make sure that Delyn is able to take full advantage of our excellent north Wales growth deal and the northern powerhouse plan being undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth. I put him on notice that a growing number of Welsh MPs will be beating a path to his door to make sure that our needs are properly looked after.

I could not be prouder to represent my home. I have lived there all my life. I attended school at Ysgol Maes Garmon in Mold, where I was proud to become the first person in my family to learn Welsh, a skill that I hold as one of my most valuable assets. *Mi fyddaf felly yn gwneud cymaint ag y medraf i gynrychioli pobl Delyn hyd eithaf fy ngallu. Mae eu problemau nhw yr un fath â fy mhroblemau i. Dwi'n caru'r lle, a fy ngobaith mwyaf ydy bod fy ymdrechion yn ddigon i adael marc ac i wneud bywydau pobl Delyn yn well.* I will do everything in my power to represent the people of Delyn to the very best of my ability, because I am one of them. Their issues are my issues. I love the place dearly, and it is my abiding hope that my efforts are enough to make a mark, to make life better for the constituents of Delyn and, through that work, to bring people together as we move forward to the next phase of our national story, as we truly do define Britain's deserved place in the world.

9.2 pm

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): It is wonderful to see you deservedly back in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts) for his excellent maiden speech? I am afraid that my Welsh ancestors would view me very dimly for not being able to respond in Welsh, but I will try harder in future. May I also pay tribute to all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today? They have given us a tour de force on the constituencies of this great United Kingdom, and it fills me with great joy to hear newly elected Members speak so passionately about their communities in this wonderful House of Commons.

It is important that the main debate on the Queen's Speech starts with Britain's place in the world, because we are at a pivotal moment in our national history. Three and a half years ago the people of this country voted, clearly and very decisively in my constituency, to leave the European Union, and I was appalled by the previous Parliament's attempts to frustrate that democratic decision. Two general elections later, we now have a decisive majority. The British people had to express themselves three times over before the political establishment finally got the message that they want us to leave the European Union. That throws into sharp relief the importance of our looking outwards into the world—not

being little England or a small island nation, but global Britain. That is very much where the great strength of our history has been and where our strength and future prosperity lie.

This country has unique global links—more than any other nation on earth. Our history with the Commonwealth, which has been referenced many times in this debate, is part of that, but there is also the strength of the English language around the world, the strength of our common law system, and the respect in which this country is held. All that puts us in a good position for the future. We can use our unique global links to be a conduit or bridge, given our proximity to continental Europe.

Right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned the importance of future trade agreements not only with the European Union, but with the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the rest of the Commonwealth and other nations. As an island trading nation, we rely on global transportation, and we are the world's second aviation power behind the United States. I therefore want to make an early bid for a reduction in air passenger duty at the Budget. This country charges the highest air passenger duty of any major developed nation. Only Chad charges more, and many of our European competitors do not charge any at all. We need to address that as we look to trade globally.

In the previous Parliament, I was proud to be a member of the Select Committee on International Development and, again, there have been many comments about our commitment to give 0.7% of gross national income in aid. However, we need to use that international aid budget in a much smarter way not only to respond, as rightly we should as a responsible nation, to natural disasters, to deal with the consequences of conflicts around the world and to help the poorest and most marginalised, but in the interests of ensuring that Britain's influence around the world is increased in security, trade and this country's clear commitment to playing our part in addressing climate change. I again pay tribute to the Conservative Government for ensuring that we are the first major world economy to commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We should firmly promote that commitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) mentioned the British overseas territories. All too often in our recent history, as he correctly pointed out, they have been an afterthought or even forgotten. It is important that that British family, as he correctly termed those overseas territories, have respect paid to them. They are loyal to this country, and they deserve proper attention. Specifically on the Chagos Islands, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, my constituency has perhaps the largest population of Chagossians anywhere in the world. They were appallingly exiled from their homeland by the Harold Wilson Administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and I believe that they should have a right of return. However, it is clear that in February 2019 the International Court of Justice came to a judgment that the islands should be handed to Mauritius, and I think we should reject that. The majority of Chagos islanders—certainly the ones I know and speak of—despite their treatment by this country, cherish the support of British sovereignty, and I do not think we should pay heed to that judgment. It is quite clear to me that the Chagos islanders are British.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I thank my hon. Friend for everything he is saying about the Chagossians and for his incredible work on the all-party parliamentary group on the Chagos Islands. If we, as a Government, uphold the right to self-determination for Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands and the British people of all British territories, why should the Chagossians be treated differently?

**Henry Smith:** My hon. Friend is entirely right about self-determination. As a democracy, we have been talking about our own self-determination to leave the European Union and how people were seeking to thwart it. As a country, we believe in self-determination for ourselves and for other people around the world. It is absolutely right that, just like every other British overseas territory, the people of the Chagos Islands should be able to decide their own future, not an international court that seeks to pass and hand down judgments. The Chagos islanders have been ignored for far too long, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it is their territory and that it is for them to decide their own future. If given that choice, I think they will correctly choose to be part of the British family.

In conclusion, because I know other hon. and right hon. Members want to speak, I will mention our overseas territories and the important role that Britain is playing and can play in promoting environmental sustainability. Through our overseas territories, we are responsible for millions of square miles of ocean around the world. I commend this Conservative Government for the Blue Belt programme that we have initiated around many of our British overseas territories. The programme plays an important role in marine conservation around the world.

That is Britain at its best: outward looking, ambitious, free-trading, promoting liberty, promoting the environment and promoting justice around the world, and doing so as a responsible global state. The best years of Britain as a global nation are ahead of it, and I am grateful that is a key policy of this Government.

9.12 pm

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** I congratulate you on your election, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure to see you back in the Chair. You will recall that, last night, you and I were at a dinner with my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts) and that it came to be called the “APPG for London restaurants.” That is an appropriate title.

**Rob Roberts:** You’re the chair.

**John Howell:** I thank my hon. Friend for making me the chair. Talking to him last night, we did not get even the slightest hint of what an excellent maiden speech he was going to give. I thank him for entertaining us in a very positive way and for giving an excellent maiden speech.

Throughout this debate, I have been increasingly perturbed by the Eurocentric comments from both sides of the House. Those Eurocentric comments have been particularly focused on the European Union. I understand why people are focused on the European Union, as we are leaving, but there is a bigger Europe out there. It is a Europe characterised by the Council of Europe, which is a non-EU body of which we will remain a member.

It has been my great pleasure, as it has been yours, Mr Deputy Speaker, to be a delegate to the Council of Europe for many years. It has 47 member states, which is almost twice as many as the EU. Yet what do we do with it? I shall tell the House a bit about what we do with it and why we should take it more seriously.

In the debate on the EU withdrawal agreement, I intervened to point out that the Council of Europe had already agreed, and we had already signed up to, a commitment to provide assistance for refugee children. It is not that we have done nothing; we have provided assistance for refugee children. Most importantly—this was missing from the Dubs amendment and the subsequent amendments—we have ensured that children who come to countries are integrated into local societies in a way that previously they had not been. That is very important: there is no point in just bringing children over, dumping them in a location and expecting them to get on; they have to be helped to integrate into local societies.

A big issue at the moment is climate change, on which the Council of Europe works on a grand scale throughout the whole of Europe—and it does so on a cross-party basis. It may come as a surprise to Conservative Members to hear that I have fully supported Lord Prescott in putting forward his views on climate change. Do not forget that Lord Prescott—this point is often forgotten on the Opposition Benches—was instrumental in determining the accounting mechanism for emissions at the Kyoto summit all those years ago. We should not forget that and the enormous role that he has played. It annoys my constituents enormously when I point out that what I have been doing on climate change has been in Europe, but when they realise that it is for the whole of Europe, they have to appreciate that what I do is in their interest.

There is a great ignorance of what the Council of Europe does, and that applies both to Ministers and to the Opposition. I have tried to get set up a Joint Committee of both Houses to cover the Council of Europe. Such a Committee could review what we are doing and provide us with useful advice and guidance. Sadly, that effort has not been successful so far, but I am ever hopeful that we will be able to get a Committee up and running. I stress that we should spend more time looking at and understanding what the Council of Europe does, particularly as we leave the EU, because it will become the principal way in which we will keep in contact with parliamentarians across the whole of Europe in discussions that take place four times a year, plus committee meetings in between. Those meetings are very valuable.

I wish to mention two other points, one of which is Singapore. I went to Singapore in the summer, courtesy of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators—I should declare an interest: I am an associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. I went there because everyone says that London is pre-eminent in the legal profession—London is the place where everyone goes to make sure that they can get their cases, whether civil or others, heard—but that is absolute nonsense. Go to Singapore and see what they have done for their mediation and arbitration services. With the help of the Singapore Government, they have very good rooms in which to meet to carry forward mediations and arbitrations, and they have done one thing in particular that stands out around the world, which is to introduce a new international Singapore convention that allows for awards in one

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country to be recognised by another country and to be kept up in that country. We have still not signed that convention. We need to do so as quickly as possible and to play our part in it. In the meantime, we need to spend a lot more time here in the UK, looking at what the future of alternative dispute resolution can achieve, and we need to put the resources into it to ensure that it happens.

Finally, let me briefly echo the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on Israel. The UK is the second largest trade partner with Israel. We are a phenomenal trade partner with that county. Let me just declare another interest as vice-chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel. I will provide Members with an example of how this could work to our own benefit. Immediately after the election—the day after the election—I was on a plane to Israel to attend an event in Jerusalem. I went there because I thought that it was the best antidote to electioneering, even though Israel itself is just about to go into its third general election in the space of a year. None the less, it was a very good place to visit. I went to the Israeli ambulance service. Everything there works on the basis of an app that sends the appropriate ambulance to the scene—whether it be so large and so well stocked that an operation could take place in the back of it, or whether it be something more modest. A person can press an app that immediately sends the details of what drugs they are taking, and what treatment they are going through to the ambulance service. When that ambulance arrives, the staff can begin treating them in an appropriate way that helps to save lives. That sort of technology is available for us if we want to look at it carefully. If we want to take it, scale it up and use it across the UK, it has the potential to save a tremendous number of lives.

Finally, let me say a few things on Nigeria. I am the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria. Our Serjeant-at-Arms, who was here a moment ago, is part of the Nigerian diaspora. Let us not forget that Africa provides us with an enormous opportunity for the future. It provides us with markets the size of which we do not yet completely understand. By 2050, Nigeria will be the third most populous country in the whole of the world. China and India will be vying for one and two, then it will be Nigeria. Unless we get it right and unless we get the people to help themselves, to develop their own countries and to provide jobs for young people, we will run into a tremendous amount of problems not just in Africa, but in Europe as well.

9.22 pm

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I believe that I am the last speaker—last, but hopefully not least—and I shall, out of respect for my colleagues, keep to within the 10-minute limit. I wish to talk about foreign affairs and a little bit about Huawei.

First of all, let me pay tribute to the many excellent maiden speeches that we have heard tonight. The American writer Gore Vidal is quoted as saying:

“Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies.”

I have heard so many excellent speeches from new Members this evening that I feel I am positively withering away. Congratulations to my hon. Friends the Members

for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan), for Stafford (Theo Clarke), the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts), who made a superb and moving speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) and anyone else whom I have failed to mention.

I am not commenting on anything to do with defence due to my role as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, but I would like to talk briefly on foreign affairs. The world is changing and we are changing. We are leaving the European Union in two weeks and we will be an independent state again. In recognition of that, the foreign affairs review has the potential to become highly influential, and I am extremely grateful that the Government have had the foresight to announce this, as it is hugely valuable.

What is the state of the world that we are going to move into in about a fortnight's time? Globally, although conventional wars are in decline and much of humanity enjoys more enriched lives than ever before, the world, in some senses, has become a more challenging place. New forms of integrated conflict and competition are being developed by rivals and potential adversaries, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton spoke so eloquently—we have talked about this when we both had different jobs in a previous life. The international rules-based system is under threat and the battle for the 21st century, I think, is, in part, between open and closed societies that will shape the future of humanity. I will come to Huawei in a short while if I may.

The following points are important. “Global Britain” implies a national global strategy to express the nation's values and interests beyond our shores. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) rightly said that our foreign policy needs to promote happiness and prosperity, but what does that mean and what would be in the detail? We need a national strategy council to develop that national global strategy. I believe that that should come out of the existing National Security Council, so we would have a Janus-like organisation; the National Security Council would deal with reactive issues and problems, and the national strategy council would look five, 10 or 15 years ahead at potential threats and opportunities. Out of that, we would need to produce a national global strategy, which should be not cost driven, but—where reasonable—needs driven. That point was eloquently made by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray). The national global strategy should be based on three freedoms that we have historically championed: freedom to trade, freedom of thought and freedom from oppression—the great things for which we have always tried to stand.

On a more tactical level, we need much more joint effects working across Government Departments—what, in the Army, we might have called joint effects teams—to encourage integrated working. At embassy level, this should include integrated line management. UK ambassadors and high commissioners should have line management of all their staff. There should be a single legal chain for decision making, and a common set of pay and conditions, which there is not at the moment. That can cause friction, especially because folks in the FCO, who are hugely qualified, generally earn less than civil servants in other Government Departments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) said that we should deepen our ties with Canada, New Zealand and Australia in the new CANZUK alliance covering trade, defence, academia and research. That is part of, but not instead of, a renewed commitment to multilateralism. An important part of our overseas strategy is the ability to see issues holistically, whether that is Nord Stream 2—a new pipeline in the Baltic that is one of Russia’s key strategic aims in Europe—or, in our own country, the issue of the Chinese tech giant Huawei and its potential involvement in our 5G network. This is an extraordinarily important issue—one of the major issues of the 21st century—but sadly there has been little debate about or parliamentary scrutiny of the matter in this country.

US officials are in town today in a last-ditch attempt to win UK support for their position on Huawei. We should listen very closely not only to our friends in the United States, regardless of what one thinks of President Trump, but also to friends in places such as Australia, who have taken the decision not to include Chinese high tech in their own 5G networks. The blunt reality is that China is a cyber-risk and will remain so for years. It has a dreadful reputation for cyber-attacks and intellectual property theft against western and global institutions and firms. Huawei itself is the subject of a US investigation for fraud and commercial espionage. China, with whom it is vital to have good relations, has sadly become more adversarial internationally and less tolerant of dissent domestically.

Sadly, the debate over Huawei is marked by dangerous levels of misunderstanding and sometimes disinformation. For example, Huawei argues that it is a private firm. In no meaningful sense is that correct. Huawei is, to all intents and purposes, part of the Chinese state, and to allow it a role in the 5G network is effectively to allow China and its agencies access to our network. To say otherwise is simply false. It is argued that Huawei will enable wider market provision. In reality, the opposite is the case, because China openly seeks to dominate global comms. The risk is that by supporting Chinese high tech, we will allow such firms—pumped by billions from Chinese investment banks—to undercut western firms such as Ericsson and Nokia, with whom we do not need “no spy” agreements because we know they will not spy on us.

It is also claimed that Huawei will be limited to the fringes of the 5G network. Sadly, this argument has been used quite a bit. It is, say experts, untrue. According to the experts, there is nothing like the same extent of difference between core and non-core in 5G as in 4G. For example, antennas in 5G will not be dumb bits of kit but complex and intelligent bits of hardware and software. To be in the 5G system anywhere will be to be in the 5G system *per se*. That is why Rob Strayer, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, has said that any role for Huawei in a 5G network here or elsewhere poses an “unacceptable risk” and will potentially damage our relationship with the United States but also with other Five Eyes nations. We need to build up alliances and not risk them in this day and age. There are other powerful moral arguments against the use of Chinese firms in our high tech that I do not have time to deal with now, but in short, China is using big data and artificial intelligence to build up a highly efficient surveillance state the kind of which the world has not seen.

It is important that complex and holistic issues like Huawei and Nord Stream 2 become absolutely part of our foreign policy review. Whoever becomes Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, whether it is me, my excellent hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) or my equally excellent hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat)—both superb previous Chairmen; I hope I persuade folks in this House to focus on the word “previous”—they should be pledging to open an immediate investigation into the suitability of Huawei and Chinese high tech in our systems to see if there is any way that they can be claimed or argued to be trusted vendors.

Our new global Britain needs integration and strategy. We need to see issues holistically both at home and abroad. Preferably, we need to ensure that the public but also Members in this House play a strong and inclusive role in the foreign policy review.

9.32 pm

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate on Britain’s role in the world and to follow the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), who is always such a thoughtful and strategic thinker. I think we all benefit from his thoughts.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) recognised his own repetitiveness but certainly gave a thoughtful speech on defence policy and the need to remember that most conflicts that we face and have faced in the past have not been predicted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) talked passionately about the international history of Newcastle—a city much like Liverpool, where I proudly represent the Liverpool, Walton constituency. She talked about the importance of manufacturing and trade as the UK leaves the European Union, and about next week’s UK-Africa summit and the need for our trade relationship with Africa to be beneficial to African nations.

We have heard some excellent maiden speeches. The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) painted a lovely picture of a historical place in our country but also talked about the people struggling in the constituency that she represents. I enjoyed the returning maiden speech, if I can call it that, by the hon. Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond), who said that she is one of only two Members of this House to be born in Aden. I knew the hon. Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke) before her election through her work at the Coalition for Global Prosperity, so it is a pleasure to see her take her seat. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) reminded the House of the plight of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) made a passionate speech in which she described how the world is becoming divided between Steve Bannon’s new world order of bully-boy Presidents and the world that some of us want to see, which is much fairer, tackles the real issues of inequality and poverty, and speaks up for human rights. There were excellent maiden speeches from the hon. Members for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan), for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) and for Delyn (Rob Roberts). My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) set out her views on a foreign policy underpinned by security, trade and human rights and the risks of our leaving some of the security arrangements within the EU.

[Dan Carden]

As we start a new decade and look towards a new era of Britain outside the EU, the big question for us all in this Parliament is what type of country do we want to be on the world stage? Who will our allies and partners be in the months and years to come? Who will we side with? Will we side with human rights abusers, bully-boy Presidents, warmongers and those who seek to wreck our environment, or will we be on the side of international law and human rights, promoting peace and diplomacy? Will we stand alongside people across the globe who are fighting for a more just world, to end global poverty, inequality, conflict and climate catastrophe?

In recent years, I am afraid that this Government have too often put this country on the wrong side of that divide, selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, building friendships with controversial nationalists such as Viktor Orbán, conducting trade talks with the US to sell off our NHS, funding the fossil fuel industry overseas through export finance and UK aid, and failing to condemn President Trump's dangerous foreign policy decisions—instead inviting him for state visits, with little to say about his Muslim ban, detaining child migrants, threats of nuclear Armageddon, and military interventionism by tweet. Let us remember that it is this US President who turned his back on the Kurds after they fought ISIS in Syria; cut United Nations Relief and Works Agency funding, which supports 5.5 million Palestinian refugees; and is withdrawing the United States from the Paris climate agreement. If we want a stable world, Britain's leaders must be brave enough to stand up to the reckless actions and rhetoric of all world leaders, whoever they are. If we want lasting peace in the world, we must use diplomacy and speak up for international law. Real strength is standing up for those values.

It was the last Labour Government who established the independent Department for International Development back in 1997. Under this Prime Minister, it seems that barely a week goes by without rumours of DFID shutting, merging, shrinking, folding or being denied its own Secretary of State. Those concerned with the fight against global poverty have spent too much precious time trying to get a simple answer to a simple question, so let me ask it: are this Government committed to an independent Department for International Development with its own Secretary of State and maintaining the UK's 0.7% commitment on overseas aid? It would be great to get an answer to that question tonight.

As one of the richest countries in the world, there should be no question about our playing a role in fighting the biggest global challenges of our time: unprecedented inequality, with 26 individuals owning the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of humanity; rising global hunger, with 800 million people not having enough food to eat; forced displacement on an unimaginable scale; conflicts with no end in sight; and a catastrophic climate crisis. If we are going to tackle those challenges, there is a lot that Britain needs to do differently on the world stage, from ensuring fairer trade deals, clamping down on global tax-dodging, preventing countries from falling into debt crises and reshaping our relations with countries in the global south so that they are no longer based on the extraction of resources and exploitation of people. Putting those structural issues aside, keeping DFID would be the smallest gesture we can make.

In the Queen's Speech, we heard about plans to carry out an integrated security, defence and foreign policy review, which will

“reassess the nation's place in the world, covering...defence to diplomacy and development.”

Can the Minister enlighten us as to when this review will happen, and crucially, will he assure us that a broad range of stakeholders will be involved in the review, including civil society organisations in the UK and those overseas who are impacted by the UK's international policies?

The UK will host COP26 in Glasgow later this year. It will be a pivotal moment in the fight for climate justice. We welcome the Government's commitment to binding targets to net zero, and of course we want the Government to go further. These targets mean nothing unless the UK takes swift action now, and there are just 10 short months left until the summit. We must remember that this is not a problem for the future; people across the global south are already suffering the reality of the climate catastrophe. The UK must make serious progress on transforming our own economy and bringing emissions down right away if, as host, we are to lead and persuade others to follow. What exactly will the Government do in the coming months to prove that Britain is serious about cutting emissions, and what exactly will the Prime Minister be doing right away to bring the small subset of obstructive leaders, including President Trump, on board with the world's climate agreement?

At some point, this House and perhaps a future Government will have to accept that the dominant economic system is broken—a world where 90% of global resources are controlled by a wealthy few, where \$1 trillion a year are lost to the global south through illicit financial flows, where global corporations violate human rights and wreck our environment with impunity. The crisis of global poverty and grotesque inequality will not be solved until political leaders find the will to act.

Let me end on a note of caution. Britain's role in the world has changed enormously in the last 50 years. We were once an empire and now, thankfully, we are not. We can and we must continue to show global leadership, but we must do that by standing true to our values of human rights, diplomacy, international law and social justice, and we must do it through international co-operation and partnership, working within and defending and strengthening international institutions, such as the United Nations, that Britain was at the heart of establishing after the second world war. The coming years are a time to reflect on and reshape Britain's place and role in the world, not a time for bombast, jingoistic imperialism or, indeed, short-sighted nationalism. The Labour party will always promote real internationalism through co-operation and solidarity.

9.42 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Andrew Stephenson):** It is an honour to address this House on behalf of the Government and to close this debate on Britain in the world. I am grateful for the insightful contributions from all the right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken, and I will try to respond to as many of the points raised as I can. I am particularly delighted to welcome the maiden speeches from new Members—my hon. Friends the Members for

Delyn (Rob Roberts) and for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), and my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Theo Clarke) and for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan).

For me, my hon. Friend the new Member for Stafford is a familiar face, as I have met her several times in her former role as chief executive and founder of the cross-party Coalition for Global Prosperity. She paid full and deserved tribute to her predecessor, Jeremy Lefroy, whose expertise in international development was respected across this House. She has already proven herself as a powerful advocate of Britain's global role in promoting international development, and I think the people of Stafford will be incredibly well served by her.

It is appropriate that my hon. Friend the new Member for Wakefield made his maiden speech in this debate, given his wide experience around the world—and we “Agadoo” warmly welcome him. *[Laughter.]* He is the first Ahmadiyya Muslim ever elected to this place, which is an important first and consistent with our party's record as one of opportunity. His experience advising a range of Governments across the world will I hope be extended to offering me some helpful tips, and I hope he will not mind if I try to parachute him in from time to time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton has a tough act to follow in Sir Alan Duncan, but her maiden speech has been rightly praised from both sides of the House. I am sure all Members will agree with her remarks on serving our constituents to the best of our abilities. She also made several telling comments about the complex nature of the diplomatic and national security challenges we face today. I welcome the expertise she brings to this and look forward to her contribution in future debates on this topic.

My hon. Friend the new Member for Delyn spoke persuasively about our Union and Wales's place in Britain, largely speaking without notes. It is excellent to see more Conservative representatives from Wales, and particularly from constituencies with large aerospace factories, in his case Airbus, in mine Rolls-Royce. As he said, we are now truly the party of the workers. He spoke warmly about his predecessor, who was, indeed, well respected across the House, as I feel sure my hon. Friend will be.

I also welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for St Albans. As someone who lives next door to a pub, I welcomed the focus of her remarks. I can assure her that the Government will keep Britain open—open to business and open to collaboration on science and climate change. She paid a generous tribute to her predecessor, Anne Main. Anne was one of this House's leading advocates for the Bangladeshi community and for persecuted Rohingya Muslims. I pay tribute to Anne for her work, and I am sure the hon. Lady and other Members around the House will continue with that work in this Parliament.

This Government are immensely proud of Britain's role in the world—in history, now, and in the new role we will play as we get Brexit done and unleash the potential of this country. My right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary is in Kenya today meeting the Kenyan President to discuss the huge potential of closer partnership between our countries. I have just this morning returned from Africa—I was pleased to visit Angola, Uganda and Namibia—where I discussed deepening our trading partnerships with those countries.

Relationships that boost British business but also strengthen countries across Africa are very important, and that point was made by several Members in this debate. Supporting countries' economic growth to help them become self-sustaining is their best route out of poverty.

As we leave the European Union, we will embark on a new chapter in our country's history, deciding for ourselves our own priorities and negotiating our own trade deals—deals that will be fair as well as free. We will strengthen our links with the Commonwealth, which boasts some of the most dynamic economies around the world. The African investment summit we are holding in London next week was mentioned by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford. It will create lasting partnerships that will deliver investment, jobs and growth across Africa and in the UK.

As a responsible world-leading nation, from promoting the rights of girls to be educated or combating the devastating effects of climate change to responding to the biggest health issues around the world, we are a country that leads on the world stage. We are the only major country that meets both the NATO target of spending 2% of our GDP on defence and the target of spending 0.7% of GNI on international development. They are targets this Government will honour, and that is only possible with a strong economy.

We should be proud of the role that Britain plays in the world; where we lead, others follow. When countries call for support, Britain answers. The UK is a development superpower; our global leadership projects our values and helps to protect our interests and secure our place in the world. Development is also central to our role in bolstering the rules-based international system, a role the UK is committed to, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his remarks earlier.

After Brexit, we will bolster our crucial international alliances and institutions. We will stand up and be counted in the United Nations Security Council, the UN, NATO, the Commonwealth, the G20, the G7 and the World Trade Organisation. We are proud of our peace-building and humanitarian efforts around the world. We are proud of our record in helping reduce global poverty and helping to save lives around the world. Building on those efforts, we will aim to end the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030. This means ending malaria, one of the leading causes of death in children under five, and ending Ebola as a public health threat. It also means supporting the development and deployment of vaccines; an important signal of our commitment will be when we host Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance global replenishment conference in June.

Under this Conservative Government, the UK will continue to play a leading role in fighting for the rights of women and girls. Investing in girls' education helps to boost women in the workforce. It boosts economic growth and prevents child marriage and early pregnancy. We will stand up for the right of every girl in the world to have 12 years of quality education, one of the most basic human rights—the right to a decent education. We will strengthen our role protecting human rights around the world by further developing an independent sanctions regime to tackle those who abuse them. We will continue our campaign to promote international media freedom and to end human trafficking and modern slavery. We will continue to promote and protect LGBT

[Andrew Stephenson]

rights, including as Equal Rights Coalition chair, and we will host an international LGBT conference in May. We will seek to protect those persecuted for their faith and implement the Truro review recommendations, a topic eloquently raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield.

Another area on which the United Kingdom proudly leads the world is climate change and biodiversity loss. We were the first major economy to legislate for net zero emissions, and we will deliver by 2050. We have already reduced our carbon emissions by 43% since 1990. We have doubled the support we offer developing nations to tackle climate change and, as hosts of the UN climate change summit in Glasgow this November, we will ensure that we continue to provide global leadership. We will build new international partnerships to tackle deforestation and to protect landscapes and wildlife. We will establish a new £500 million blue planet fund to help to protect our oceans from plastic pollution, overfishing and rising sea temperatures, something rightly referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith).

Turning to a few more points raised during the debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) spoke passionately about the importance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in bringing parliamentarians together, and the role of the British Council and the BBC World Service. I could not agree more. His comments on media freedom and the number of journalists killed or still in jail really brought home why this is a top priority for the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) spoke eloquently about the importance of defence spending, an area in which he has considerable expertise. As part of the spending round 2019, the Government committed to an additional £2.2 billion of funding for defence this year. That recognises the critical role defence plays in ensuring the safety and security of British people at home and abroad, supporting our allies, projecting influence and promoting UK prosperity. However, I appreciate, as always, that he will want us to go further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who so ably chaired the Foreign Affairs Select Committee for the past two years, spoke of the need to build new partnerships while remaining vigilant about the threat from China and Russia. He also reminded us that Britain will remain in Europe—Europe is not Brussels.

I am delighted to welcome back to this place my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond), who rightly paid warm and deserved tribute to her predecessor, Sir George Hollingbery. She spoke with real knowledge about soft power. I am delighted that we are helping to re-establish the all-party group on Yemen.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) spoke with passion about defence infrastructure and, most importantly, the benefits of democracy. That is particularly apt exactly one month on from a sleepless night for all of us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) spoke about the need to prioritise a free trade agreement with the USA. As he knows, we intend to secure a deal with the EU by the end of December, but there is a

strong rationale for us to progress trade negotiations with the US from 31 January, as he said today and so eloquently set out in his recent article in *The Daily Telegraph*.

Having just returned last week from visiting the Commonwealth countries Namibia and Uganda and visiting Angola, which has applied to join the Commonwealth, I strongly agree with the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) about the importance of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was also touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has always been a strong advocate of strengthening and deepening our ties with India.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) reminded us why as the UK we are stronger together and of the fact that the UK was the first country in the G7 to hit the UN target of spending 0.7% on overseas development. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) reminded us of the importance of the Council of Europe and the issues that are discussed there. He is correct when he says that there is a lack of understanding about the Council of Europe. However, I hope that he accepts and understands that, as a former pairing Whip who used to try to move heaven and earth to get him and other people there, I do get it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) spoke about his concerns over Huawei. The final decision on high-risk vendors will be taken in due course and the Government will consider the full range of risks when making that decision.

In conclusion, the Queen's Speech lays out our ambitious, optimistic and bold vision for our new place in the world. This new vision builds on the work of the British people—their work in making our country world-leading, whether that is British medics who spent their Christmas fighting a deadly measles outbreak in Samoa, or our world-leading climate change scientists and clean energy pioneers whose endeavours will benefit from our new £1 billion Ayrton fund, or the brave men and women of our armed forces who, in 2019, were involved in 35 operations across 30 countries.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** Does my hon. Friend agree that he is outlining a positive, one nation vision not just for this country, but for world leadership? Is that not in stark contrast to those who have not learnt the lessons of the last election and who want to do Britain down? This Government recognise the fact that we can lead the world with a positive vision for this decade.

**Andrew Stephenson:** As ever, I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. Friend—he may be a Yorkshireman, but he speaks some sense. The contrast in this debate has been between the optimism and hope of Government Members and the pessimism and failed leadership bids of Opposition Members.

We are at a pivotal moment globally and for the United Kingdom. The British people have given us a mandate to proceed. We will deliver on it, and I commend the speech to the House.

*Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Rebecca Harris.)*

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow.*

## Official Development Assistance Target

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)*

9.56 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister on his appointment and recognise that he is putting in a bit of a shift on the Treasury Bench today, although he could have saved us time if he had answered a single one of the questions that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) put to him in his winding-up speech during the last debate. We might not even have needed this Adjournment debate, but as it is, this gives us the opportunity to go into some of those questions in a bit more detail.

I also take this opportunity to thank the voters in Glasgow North for returning me once again, and to my staff team, my campaign volunteers and the team in the Scottish National party Whips Office—Anne, Christopher and Kieran. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for his service in the Whips Office and welcome back my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson), who is joining the team.

I am very grateful to have secured this debate so early in the new parliamentary term because, as we heard in the preceding debate, the future of the aid budget and how it is delivered is one of the most pressing matters and choices facing the Government. It is important that they hear early on in the parliamentary term of the cross-party concerns and those of many stakeholders before they make yet another decision that they may well come to regret.

We have just 10 years left to meet the global goals for sustainable development that were agreed at the United Nations in 2015. They represent an international consensus about the kind of world that is both possible and necessary to ensure a healthy, sustainable planet and society for future generations. We should give credit where it is due: the global goals agreement was driven in no small part by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. Crucial to giving credibility to his case was the progress that the United Kingdom was making towards meeting the target of spending 0.7% of national income on official development assistance. The idea that wealthy countries should aim to spend that much on aid dates back to the 1970s, when it was calculated that doing so would generate enough resources to meet the targets that were then in place to end world poverty and improve access to food, education and other basic human rights.

Thanks again to that cross-party consensus, the UK is, as we have just heard, one of the few countries in the world not only to be meeting the target, but to have it enshrined in statute. All that is very commendable, and at a time when there is considerable disagreement in other parts of domestic and international policy, it is something that should be very carefully protected.

The success has been not just the achievement of the target but how the aid has been delivered. The Department for International Development was established in 1997. Again, it might be rare to hear an SNP Member commend the actions of the Blair Government, but this was a significant and ambitious decision, and one that has, and should continue to have, the support of a wide, cross-party consensus. Over the years, DFID has evolved

and changed, but it has provided a distinctive and dedicated voice within government that has championed our commitments and obligations to the poorest and most vulnerable around the world—

10 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)*

**Patrick Grady:** You've got to love some of the procedures in this place, Mr Speaker.

DFID has provided a vital link between delivery agencies and government, whether they are large multilateral institutions such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme, or our own domestic agencies, such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and my own former employers, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and its sister organisation, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. DFID funding has helped member organisations of the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which has provided secretariat support to the all-party group on Malawi—I hope to continue chairing that group in this Parliament. DFID support has helped its members put the network's partnership principles into practice, building priceless people-to-people and community-to-community links between the two countries and building relationships of solidarity, mutual respect and learning that help Malawi, Scotland and the UK make progress towards the sustainable development goals and more.

DFID's support for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy—I declare an interest, because I am still a member of its board of governors—has also helped to strengthen democratic institutions in developing democracies around the world. That in turn means that Governments become more effective in mobilising their own resources to help societies meet the global goals.

In recent years, countless lives have been changed by DFID's Aid Match programme, which has allowed individual donors in this country to understand more clearly just how each pound they give can change lives overseas. SCIAF told me about Paulin, a farmer in Rwanda, who has been provided with access to clean water through an Aid Match-funded programme. Paulin said that

"thanks to the support, I can now feed myself and my children. The area is very dry but we can share the water we get from the water tanks and we can grow crops. I can eat and rejoice!"

We should all rejoice at the lives changed and the progress made thanks to the delivery of the aid target through DFID.

Throughout all of this, DFID has been one of the most accountable, transparent and scrutinised UK Departments. As well as the usual round of questions here in the Chamber and a heavy load of Westminster Hall debates, active Chairs of the International Development Committee over the years have kept a keen eye on its programmes, and of course it is also scrutinised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. Publish What You Fund's global aid transparency index in 2018 rated DFID as "very good" for its effectiveness and transparency. In contrast, it rated the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as "poor". This is concerning because in recent years, particularly since 2015, the FCO has been one of the Departments spending an increasing share of the overall aid budget.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Evidence from Australia and Canada, which have merged their foreign and development departments, has shown that this can threaten the quality and impact of aid, and detailed analysis carried out by the Overseas Development Institute has found that foreign policy and development alignment has little or no obvious benefit for either. Does the hon. Gentleman agree therefore that a merger of DFID and the FCO would put at risk the excellent work that an independent DFID has done around the world, as he has outlined in his excellent speech?

**Patrick Grady:** Absolutely—the SNP, of course, promotes independence for all kinds of causes. This is at the heart of the debate. It was raised by the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson in his conclusion in today’s debate on the Queen’s Speech, it was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith), and it has been raised by Members across the House, and I will come back to it as well. I hope the Minister will take this chance to answer it. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) is absolutely right to raise the international examples, because there has been regression elsewhere in the world. The UK is supposed to pride itself on its global leadership, so let us see if that is to continue.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a passionate and compelling speech in favour of overseas development. Does he agree that we are much better able to have the kind of impact internationally that he talks about when we are one United Kingdom than we would if we were fragmented into four different nations?

**Patrick Grady:** I will be happy to return to that, but I would point out that 0.7% is a proportion of gross national income, so Scotland, under a Barnett formula or whatever, as an independent country, would continue to spend its equivalent proportion or possibly more.

We have yet another ministerial team in DFID. I welcome all those Ministers to their posts, especially those who have arrived via the Government Whips Office, but they should know that the trend away from the aid target for DFID spending is something that many of us have been keeping an eye on for many years, and it is a cause for concern. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling pointed out earlier, over 27% of ODA funds are now spent by Departments other than DFID, including the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. I have been particularly concerned about the increasing amount of spending that is effectively being double-counted, towards both the 0.7% aid target and the NATO defence spending target of 2% of gross national income. I know that Ministers will say that they do not mark their own homework and that it cannot be helped if some spending meets both measurements, but every effort should be made to ensure that the two targets are reached with distinct spending and that any overlap just happens to be a bonus.

The National Audit Office concluded in June 2019 that aid spending outside DFID was not transparent enough. Those concerns can only be compounded by the growing rumour and speculation in the press and elsewhere about the future of the Department and the Government’s commitment to the ODA target. The Tory manifesto in this election barely mentioned

international development and made no reference to the sustainable development goals. All the other main parties committed to maintaining DFID as a stand-alone Department, but the Tory manifesto was silent on that. The Minister now has an important opportunity to clarify, on the record, the Government’s position and intentions. Members have been asking about this all day, and we do not want to hear a “wait and see” response. He has seen my early-day motion about this issue and he knew perfectly well what the subject of this debate would be from the title, so here goes.

Can the Minister give the House a categorical assurance that the Government will spend 0.7% of gross national income on official development assistance each year for the lifetime of this Parliament? To do anything else would jeopardise over 20 years of cross-party consensus and risk undermining any pretence to global leadership on these issues. Can he confirm that the Government will not seek to change, or initiate changes to, pre-existing international definitions of official development assistance? If the OECD definition were to change, that should be done on the basis of an evidential need and using a consensus-based approach. At the very least, any changes would need to be agreed through a genuinely participative, consultative, global process. It would defeat the entire purpose of meeting the target if the definition of aid were to be arbitrarily or unilaterally changed, especially if it allowed aid to be used for diplomacy, military or corporate commercial purposes.

Can the Minister outline what discussions, if any, have taken place within Government about the continued existence of DFID as a dedicated, stand-alone Department? What is his response to newspaper reports that DFID might be retained as a Department, but that its Secretary of State would also be the Foreign Secretary? He must surely accept that if that were to happen, it would be a merger of the FCO and DFID in all but name. If DFID is to remain both effective and accountable, it must have its own dedicated Secretary of State, who can champion its cause in the Cabinet and answer questions on the Floor of this House.

Have any such discussions about the future of the Department been part of preparations for the Government’s proposed integrated security, defence and foreign policy review? As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton asked earlier from the Labour Front Bench, what is the timetable for the review? Will it be subject to consultation, and what other opportunities will there be for stakeholders to contribute? What is the Minister’s response to press reports that DFID country reps will be asked to report to local UK ambassadors? Does he realise that this risks politicising DFID programmes in developing countries?

Aid should be delivered without fear or favour. One of the great achievements of DFID and the global aid community since the 1990s has been the move away from conditionality of aid and the understanding that progress towards the global goals should be separated from any specific relationship issues with country Governments. We cannot allow that to slide backwards. If the Minister sees a case for integrating DFID functions with embassies, can he have a word with his colleagues at the Home Office, who are busy stripping visa functions out of embassies, privatising them and causing chaos in their wake? Either embassies are hubs for the entirety of the UK’s presence in a country or they are not.

What reassurances can the Minister give to DFID staff about the size of the workforce and the Government's commitment to retaining their expertise, especially, but not only, for those based in Scotland?

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the current reports and the lack of clarification from the Ministers in charge, staff based at DFID's East Kilbride headquarters—who are doing fantastic work in reaching the poorest people all over the world through their programmes and their specialist expertise—face an uncertain future? Does he agree that that is unfair to them, and that clarity and reassurance must be offered immediately?

**Patrick Grady:** I wholeheartedly agree, and that was the whole point of my applying for tonight's debate. We want those assurances from the UK Government.

Let me gently remind the Government, and other Conservative Members who raised this issue earlier, that in 2014 the presence of DFID in East Kilbride was touted as one of the great benefits of the Union, and it was said that its loss would be one of the great risks of independence. As I said earlier, the independence White Paper committed us to going further than the 0.7% target, and we would have wanted to retain that global expertise. It seems that—as with so many of the promises of Better Together in 2014—following Scotland's choice to stay part of the United Kingdom, all the supposed risks of independence are being realised in any event.

What reassurances can the Minister give to the many stakeholders, charities and non-governmental organisations, here in the UK and around the world, about the future of the funds that they currently receive from DFID? Changing or diminishing aid definitions, departmental restructuring, or any wavering of the 0.7% target will put at risk the ability of those organisations to deliver their programmes and plan for the future.

No organisation should be, or wants to be, dependent on specific grant funding, but for many organisations of which I have had personal experience, DFID grants provide a foundation that allows them to develop or expand other aspects of their work. That is particularly true of the UK Aid Match programme, which I mentioned earlier. It is not without its flaws, but it has grown in popularity in recent years. The best development results are achieved when funding is provided on a stable basis over a long period rather than being chopped and changed on a whim. Such agencies should also be allowed—even expected—to challenge and lobby Governments on all of these issues, without any fear that that will affect their ability to be awarded funds for overseas programmes.

My final question to the Minister, which I have asked several of his predecessors and will probably ask several of his successors, is this: how do the Government define the “national interest”? It has been a mantra of DFID Secretaries of State and other Ministers since 2015 that aid should work in the national interest, but when it comes to aid and development, how does the national interest differ from the global interest? In what way is achieving the global goals for sustainable development contrary, or somehow supplementary, to the national interest?

It is in all our interests to end poverty, to ensure that every child is given an education, to keep the oceans clean, and to help communities adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. We are all part of one human family, and our own individual dignity is diminished when our poorest sisters and brothers are forced to live in a poverty that is not of their own making, so the global interest—the global vision of the sustainable development goals—must be in the UK's national interest.

If the Government accept and recognise that, the logic follows that they must continue to meet their international obligations to aid and development through the 0.7% target, and they should deliver that through a dedicated Department for International Development. I hope very much that the Minister and his inevitable successors, in whatever shape or form, will agree.

10.13 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Andrew Stephenson):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) for securing a debate which is very timely, given some of the press reports. I hope that I shall be able to answer all his questions tonight, but before I do so, let me put on record a few of DFID's greatest hits. First, let me acknowledge the incredible contribution made by those in DFID's joint headquarters in East Kilbride, and by charities in Scotland such as the HALO Trust.

We should all be immensely proud of what our continued 0.7% commitment in legislation achieves. That commitment was shared by all—I emphasise the word “all”—parties in their manifestos at the recent general election, so the answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is a categorical “yes”. We are 100% committed to the 0.7% target throughout the current Parliament, and I cannot see that changing in any future manifesto.

The UK is, and will remain, a global champion for humanitarian relief and international development. Helping the world's poorest is at the heart of what we do. Tackling the drivers of conflict, poverty, political instability and climate change is vital to the effectiveness of that work. In that regard, the aid budget is working in our national interest and the global interest, and keeping us safe here at home. Our aid spending is also catalysing growth across the developing world, removing barriers to trade, and, in doing so, helping countries to move away from their dependence on aid and become our trading partners of the future.

We know we must maximise the good that we do with what money we have, in the interests of those we are trying to help and to create direct positive results for the UK. DFID has strict processes in place to deliver even better value for money, so that UK aid is not misspent or diverted. This includes holding aid organisations to account by tying funding to performance, closing programmes that fail to meet development objectives and increasing efficiency savings. We also have a counter-fraud and whistleblowing unit with dedicated resources assigned to investigating the misappropriation of funds.

We all know that UK aid works. To list just a few results achieved since 2015: more than 14 million children have gained a decent education, of whom almost 6 million are girls; 3.9 million people have been supported to raise their incomes or to maintain or gain a better job or livelihood; and over the past eight years, UK international climate finance programmes have supported 57 million

[Andrew Stephenson]

people to cope with the effects of climate change and enabled 26 million to have access to clean energy. The crucial support our aid programmes provide at times of humanitarian crises is something we should be proud of. More than 32 million people have been supported with humanitarian assistance since 2015, including at least 10 million women and girls.

At the UN climate action summit in September the Prime Minister committed to doubling the amount the UK spends on tackling climate change in developing countries to at least £11.6 billion from 2021 to 2025, making us the first country in the world to make a post-2020 climate finance pledge. The UK is also the largest contributor to major multilateral climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Investment Funds. DFID funds are helping to build the resilience of people and communities to cope with climate change, including natural disasters; to support the development of low carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure; and to support new technology, research and innovation to improve the effectiveness of action on climate change. Aberdeen virologist Dr Catherine Houlihan, who treated Ebola patients in the Democratic Republic of the Congo last year, has spoken about her belief that a vaccine developed with support from the UK has changed the path of this outbreak and saved thousands of lives. Most recently, UK aid efforts have focused on sending British medics to fight a deadly measles outbreak in Samoa over Christmas.

The UK is a world leader in preventing violence against women and girls. We are pioneering approaches around the world that have shown reductions in violence of around 50%, proving that violence against women and girls is preventable. The UK is also leading the way in tackling the illicit financial flows that enable global criminal gangs to operate. One UK aid project has supported African law enforcement officials to seize, confiscate or preserve over \$76 million of illegal assets in 2017.

Advancing economic development in the world's poorest countries is also fundamental to the UK's international leadership. Investing in the growth of companies in Africa and south Asia creates the jobs and economic stability that lead to global security and help to end aid dependency. That is one of the reasons that we are hosting the UK-Africa investment summit, which has been mentioned in the debate, in which 21 African countries will come to London with the aim of helping to secure quality deals, create jobs and showcase the UK's unique offer to Africa.

Life-changing progress comes from growth that transforms economies, creates productive jobs and private sector investment and spreads benefits and opportunities right across society. As we leave the European Union we will build on our strong record as a champion of trade and development. We aim to secure existing duty-free access to UK markets for the world's poorest, and continue to support developing countries to reduce poverty through trade. Helping developing countries to harness the formidable power of trade means that we are not only creating trading partners of the future for UK businesses but supporting jobs here at home. Building a more prosperous world and supporting our own long-term economic security is firmly in all our interests.

UK scientists and cutting-edge technology are also at the forefront of global efforts, from developing new vaccines to wipe out disease, to transforming the way we do development. Diagnostic tests for TB, developed with UK aid, are now being used by the national health service. The skills gained by the UK's emergency medical team in tackling diseases now benefit their work in the UK.

The way in which we achieve this is by harnessing all levers at the Government's disposal. The UK aid strategy, published in 2015, signalled the need for a new whole-of-Government approach. This allowed us to draw on the complementary skills and expertise of all Government Departments to tackle today's global challenges. For example, the UK's response to the Ebola epidemic is made more effective by leveraging the health expertise at the Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England, the logistical expertise at the Ministry of Defence, and DFID's deep contextual knowledge.

Although we have made great progress in those examples, there is more to do. I am certain that right hon. and hon. Members across the House will agree that the challenges faced by developing nations are huge.

Where the UK considers the international aid rules to be outdated, we have in the past led the way in pushing for reforms. We have achieved some important reforms, including increasing the proportion of aid spending that contributes to United Nations peacekeeping operations and reducing restrictions to support countries affected by crises and natural disasters. We continue to challenge other nations to deliver on their commitments for a better and safer world.

Turning to another of the questions asked by the hon. Member for Glasgow North, we will stick to the OECD rules on aid spending. Our 0.7% will be fully compliant with those rules. However, I will not make a commitment that we will not seek to lobby for changes to be made to the rules, because we have done so in the past, for reasons that I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree were sensible.

Aid is an important part of Britain's place in the world. As a Government we are committed to leading global efforts to tackle Ebola and malaria; to building on our existing efforts to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children by 2030; and to standing up for the right of every girl in the world to have 12 years of quality education.

During my time as a joint Minister—I was only appointed in July, after leaving the Whips Office, briefly via the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—I have seen for myself DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office working together to bring operations closer, to share expertise and to better co-ordinate responses to current and emerging challenges around the world.

The Prime Minister is responsible for all machinery of government changes, and he has not made any decisions on the future of DFID during this Parliament. The Conservative party manifesto sets out that we will proudly maintain our commitment to spending 0.7% of gross national income on development. The integrated defence, security and foreign policy review will create the opportunity to reimagine how the UK engages

internationally in the context of global Britain. DFID and FCO teams work proactively in supporting this work.

As a country, we are at a pivotal moment. As we exit the EU, the UK will need to do more, not less, and we will need to become more outward looking. Our aid commitment increases Britain's soft power and global influence. Leaving the EU has no impact on our commitment to supporting the world's most vulnerable people. Nor does it mean that the UK and the EU should stop acting together to alleviate poverty and to tackle shared global challenges when it makes sense to do so.

Let me conclude by saying that by investing less than a penny from each pound of our income in aid, the UK is helping create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.23 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Monday 13 January 2020

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Departmental Update

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** As set out clearly in our manifesto, the NHS is this Government's No.1 domestic priority. We are supporting the NHS through our historic funding settlement, which will see the NHS budget increase by £33.9 billion within the next five years. This will soon be enshrined into law.

I recently set out my priorities for the system<sup>[1]</sup>. This statement highlights the work that has already begun to deliver on these priorities, including our major manifesto commitments of:

- 50,000 more nurses;
- 40 new hospitals over the next decade;
- ending unfair hospital car parking charges;
- and 50 million more GP appointments.

#### Infrastructure

Work has already begun to deliver our manifesto commitment on free hospital parking for those who need it. This Government recently announced that from April 2020, disabled people, frequent out-patient attenders, parents of sick children staying overnight, and staff working night shifts will be able to access free hospital car parking. This change will benefit thousands of NHS patients and visitors in England and mean that across the country we have a consistent approach whereby those with the greatest need will no longer have to pay for parking. We will also consider car parking capacity across the country, and how improved technology will reduce burdens for hospitals, and take away stress for visitors.

#### Prevention

Community pharmacies play a crucial role in helping people stay healthy and prevent pressure on hospitals. In October 2019, as part of our 'pharmacy first approach', the community pharmacist consultation service was introduced. This means people with minor illnesses or who need medicine urgently have been referred to local pharmacies. More than 100,000 patients have had appointments with expert pharmacists in the last 10 weeks, relieving pressure on GPs and A&E departments.

#### People

As we begin 2020, the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, we are embarking on the biggest nursing recruitment drive in decades, backed by a new universal support package. Nursing students on courses from September 2020 will now benefit from guaranteed, additional support of at least £5,000 a year to help with living costs, some students could be eligible for up to £8,000 per year. It is expected to benefit more than 35,000 students every year. The funding will not have to be repaid by recipients.

The new year's honours list for 2020 celebrated the incredible work taking place in the health and social care sector all around the UK. This included senior leaders Professor Dame Sally Davies (Chief Medical Officer between 2011 and 2019), Simon Stevens (NHS Chief Executive) and Lyn Romeo (Chief Social Worker).

#### Technology

We will use frontline technology to improve patients' experience, provide flexible working for clinicians, and help save lives.

This Government have announced that it will provide £40 million to reduce NHS staff login times, tackling one of the main technology frustrations facing NHS staff. Currently, many NHS staff have to log in to multiple computer programmes when tending to a patient, with each programme requiring its own login details. Some staff may need to log in to as many as 15 different systems. This outdated technology slows down and frustrates staff and prevents them from giving patients their full attention and the care they deserve. Harnessing the best technology will improve care for patients and improve the burden on our staff.

To further improve the digital capability of NHS trusts, we will set up a new 'digital aspirant' programme. This will provide funding over several years to assist with digital transformation projects so that trusts can provide safe, high-quality and efficient care.

Additionally, this Government have announced that a further £4.5 million will be given to local authorities to develop digital adult social care projects to support the most vulnerable in society to live independently for longer and improve information sharing across the NHS and social care.

<sup>[1]</sup><https://policyexchange.org.uk/pxevents/keynote-speech-by-the-rt-hon-matt-hancock-mp/>.

[HCWS30]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Local Housing Allowance

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince):** I am announcing that from April 2020 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates will be increased in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), ending the freeze to the local housing allowance and delivering on the manifesto commitment to end the benefit freeze.

The Rent Officers Orders for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, which provide for the increase, will be laid in the House later today and a corresponding provision will implement the changes for Northern Ireland

This increase will mean the majority of people in receipt of housing support in the private rented sector will see their housing support increase, on average benefiting by around £10 per month.

This Government continue to spend around £95 billion a year on working age benefits, including around £23 billion to help people with their housing costs.

Ending the freeze to LHA rates ensures we are continuing to support the most vulnerable in society. And, as announced at the spending round in September 2019 there will be an additional £40 million in discretionary housing payments for 2020-21, to help affordability in the private rented sector.

My Department will continue to work with colleagues across Government on housing, including working closely with MHCLG to find ways to reduce homelessness and meet the cost of living in rented accommodation through good housing supply and a welfare system that supports the vulnerable.

[HCWS29]



# Petition

Monday 13 January 2020

## OBSERVATIONS

### DEFENCE

#### **Frigate named HMS Cornwall**

The petition of residents of Truro and Falmouth,

Declares that one of the new Type 31e General Purpose Frigates should be named HMS Cornwall.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure this is done.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sarah Newton, *Official Report*, Tuesday 5 November 2019; Vol. 667, c. 748.]

[P002542]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey):*

The names for a new ship or a class of ship are initially proposed by the Royal Navy Ships' Names and Badges Committee (SNBC). In considering any name, the Committee takes into account many aspects including the history of that name, battle honours, recent affiliations, and the civic support that may go with it. The SNBC presents its recommendations to the Navy Board; the name(s) chosen by the Navy Board are forwarded to the Secretary of State for Defence before being submitted to Her Majesty the Queen for approval.

The names of the Type 31 Frigates have been proposed by the Navy Board. When names are agreed they will be announced at appropriate opportunities in the future.



# Ministerial Corrections

Monday 13 January 2020

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill

*The following is an extract from the debate in the Committee of the whole House on the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill on Tuesday 7 January 2020.*

**Brandon Lewis:** Let me finish the point. It takes five to 10 minutes online in the same way as renewing a driving licence or passport. The hon. Lady should be aware that, as of the last set of official figures, only two people have been actively refused settled status, and both refusals were on serious criminality grounds. I stand by this country's right to protect the security and safety of people in this country by refusing settled status to people with a serious criminal record.

*[Official Report, 7 January 2020, Vol. 669, c. 321-22.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister for Security, the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis):*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford).

*The correct response should have been:*

**Brandon Lewis:** Let me finish the point. It takes five to 10 minutes online in the same way as renewing a driving licence or passport. The hon. Lady should be aware that, as of the last set of official figures, only **five** people have been actively refused settled status, and both refusals were on serious criminality grounds. I stand by this country's right to protect the security and safety of people in this country by refusing settled status to people with a serious criminal record.

*The following is a further extract from that debate.*

**Brandon Lewis:** I will be brief. I just want to respond to a couple of points that have been raised during the debate. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) quoted me during an interview some time ago—with a German journalist, if I recall correctly. Sadly, he did not give the whole quote, so colleagues are probably not quite aware of the point I was making, which was that the whole point of the settled status scheme is to ensure that nobody is left behind and all rights are properly protected. That is why not only are we running the scheme until the end of July 2021, but we have also said—as I said at the Dispatch Box again today—that we will be looking to grant settled status to anybody who comes forward after that stage who has not acquired settled status after not applying for it for a good, reasonable reason. This scheme is based on a very different principle.

*[Official Report, 7 January 2020, Vol. 669, c. 336.]*

An error has been identified in my closing speech on amendment 5:

*The correct wording should have been:*

**Brandon Lewis:** I will be brief. I just want to respond to a couple of points that have been raised during the debate. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) quoted me during an interview some time ago—with a German journalist, if I recall correctly. Sadly, he did not give the whole quote, so colleagues are probably not quite aware of the point I was making, which was that the whole point of the settled status scheme is to ensure that nobody is left behind and all rights are properly protected. That is why not only are we running the scheme until the end of **June** 2021, but we have also said—as I said at the Dispatch Box again today—that we will be looking to grant settled status to anybody who comes forward after that stage who has not acquired settled status after not applying for it for a good, reasonable reason. This scheme is based on a very different principle.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 13 January 2020

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# PETITION

Monday 13 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
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Frigate named HMS Cornwall .....	3P	

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Monday 13 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>
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European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill .....	1MC

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**not later than  
Monday 20 January 2020**

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