

Vol. 800  
No. 9



Thursday  
24 October 2019

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)

# HOUSE OF LORDS

## OFFICIAL REPORT

*ORDER OF BUSINESS*

Questions	
Transport: Buses.....	671
Healthcare: Brain Tumours.....	673
Polio: Pakistan and Afghanistan.....	676
Syria: British Armed Forces.....	678
Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill [HL]	
Duty to Plan for Terrorism (Consultation) Bill [HL]	
Storage Period for Gametes Bill [HL]	
Access to Palliative Care and Treatment of Children Bill [HL]	
Elections (Candidates' Expenditure and Nominations) Bill [HL]	
<i>First Readings</i> .....	681
Business of the House	
<i>Timing of Debates</i> .....	682
Brexit: Movement of Goods between Northern Ireland and Great Britain	
<i>Statement</i> .....	682
Neighbourhood Services: Government Support	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i> .....	686
Syria and Iraq	
<i>Question for Short Debate</i> .....	712
Hong Kong	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i> .....	726

Lords wishing to be supplied with these Daily Reports should give notice to this effect to the Printed Paper Office.

No proofs of Daily Reports are provided. Corrections for the bound volume which Lords wish to suggest to the report of their speeches should be clearly indicated in a copy of the Daily Report, which, with the column numbers concerned shown on the front cover, should be sent to the Editor of Debates, House of Lords, within 14 days of the date of the Daily Report.

*This issue of the Official Report is also available on the Internet at  
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-10-24>*

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

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

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

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Lords 2019,  
*this publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence,  
which is published at [www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/).*

# House of Lords

Thursday 24 October 2019

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Salisbury.

## Transport: Buses Question

11.07 am

Asked by **Baroness Randerson**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage more people to travel by bus.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con):** My Lords, the Government are boosting bus services, harnessing bus data and tackling congestion. To boost services, the new bus deal includes an additional £30 million on top of the £43 million already paid to local authorities. To harness data, the bus open data digital service will collate real-time location and fare data. On congestion, we will update guidance to local authorities on bus priority measures.

**Baroness Randerson (LD):** My Lords, despite some one-off initiatives, which of course one welcomes, we continue to face a bus emergency. For instance, 65% of local authorities no longer provide free transport for 16 to 18 year-olds, and many bus services have been cut. Does the Minister agree that we need a national bus strategy to promote increased usage, zero-emission buses and more integrated services? Do the Government intend to reform and significantly increase funding for bus services to address the £650 million funding gap faced by local authorities and operators over concessionary fares?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I am pleased to be able to agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Randerson. It is critical that we have a national bus strategy. The Government have already announced that we will put in place such a strategy. Going alongside that will be our commitment to long-term funding for the bus sector.

**The Earl of Listowel (CB):** My Lords, I welcome the news of this bus strategy, but will the Minister look at vulnerable groups, in particular parents who are in temporary accommodation such as hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation? Very often, they can be extremely isolated and may have to make many bus journeys to see their family and friends. Will the Government please look at that in their bus strategy?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I thank the noble Earl for raising this issue. As the Minister for loneliness in the Department for Transport, I know how important it is that we make sure that our transport system is able to get those people to where they need to go. We are currently scoping the bus strategy. I shall certainly include that within its remit.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, in relation to a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, will my noble friend the Minister try to ensure that all new buses have details of concessionary fares on the side?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I shall certainly take that very good point back to the department. It is also important to make sure that we make the most of the data that local operators have about their buses and collate it in one place, so that people can see information about where their bus is, and how much it will cost them, when they get on it.

**The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** My Lords, in welcoming the strategy, I am aware that we have seen numerous stories this week about levels of pollution, particularly along school runs, so we should do everything we can to get children on to buses where appropriate. However, many buses are still very poor in terms of the pollution they create, which might take some years to go through. Is there any way in which the Government can help bus companies move more rapidly to zero emissions?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** The right reverend Prelate is right, and pollution is a key element that we are taking forward in our strategy. To date, the Government have provided £240 million, which went towards 7,000 cleaner and better buses, but we must do more. In the new bus package that was announced recently, one provision was £50 million for the first all-electric bus town or city.

**Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab):** My Lords, this week, the Government announced that electric cars will be allowed to use bus lanes. Have the Government done a risk assessment of whether there will be any delays to buses using their own lanes, therefore making bus journeys longer for passengers?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** The noble Lord is right that that is one proposal on the table. It is not set in stone that it will indeed be allowed to happen, but it is important that we make sure that people feel able to take up electric vehicles. They are very important to our future carbon strategy, and of course we are looking at the impact on buses.

**Lord Tebbit (Con):** Is my noble friend aware of the problems that are sometimes faced by rather old-fashioned people seeking to take a journey by bus who want to proffer their fare in money—cash?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I thank my noble friend for his question. I am aware that that may be an issue for an increasingly small number of people.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I would encourage them to make full use of the different fare payment options that are available.

**Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab):** My Lords, for two years I was chairman of London Buses—it is the best bus service in the country—and I learned that buses are a key part of a fair society, carrying the young, the old, the sick and the poor. That is why the Labour Party has committed to £1.3 billion of additional funding to restore the 3,000 cuts made by this Government, to local regulation to optimise net social benefit and to free bus fares for young people. Will the proposed strategy match these commitments?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I thank the noble Lord for his question, but I also point out that this Government support the bus sector to the tune of £2.2 billion from the taxpayer. That is 12% higher in real terms than under the last Labour Government. I also point out that the £1.3 billion that the Labour Party proposes putting into buses seems to be coming away from road maintenance and upgrades. That is a false economy, because one of the key issues in getting people back on buses is journey reliability, and that relies on good roads.

**Baroness Scott of Needham Market (LD):** My Lords, important new powers were introduced in the Bus Services Act 2017, but because they are available only to areas with elected mayors, most rural areas are excluded from them. If experience shows that these powers are effective, will the Government rethink their availability to rural areas?

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton:** I hate to disagree with the noble Baroness, but there are two different types of powers that came in under the Bus Services Act. The first is the franchising power, and in that regard, she is right; it is available only to local elected mayors, because it needs a significant grouping of bus operators and also the population. What is available to all local authorities, and is really important, is enhanced partnerships, where the local authority works with the operator. The local authority can put in place bus priority measures and parking enforcement and, in return, the bus operator can provide better ticketing information and faster services.

## Healthcare: Brain Tumours

### Question

11.14 am

Asked by **Baroness Wheeler**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking (1) to improve access to palliative care, rehabilitation and psychosocial care for people living with a brain tumour, and (2) to provide support for their carers and families.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con):** My Lords, the *NHS Long Term Plan* sets a clear ambition that, where appropriate, every person diagnosed with cancer will have access to personalised care by 2021. Personalised care includes support planning based on holistic needs assessments, end-of-treatment summaries, health and well-being information and support and a cancer care review with GPs. These interventions align with the comprehensive model for personalised care and should be made available for all cancer patients, including those in need of end-of-life care.

**Baroness Wheeler (Lab):** My Lords, International Brain Tumour Awareness Week starts on Saturday, so it is timely to remember both patients and carers. Living with a brain tumour often means coping with life-changing symptoms, such as mental and emotional health issues, communication and mobility problems. Carers also need support in adjusting to these changes in the person they care for, including coping with difficult behaviour and personality changes, disorientation and confusion. Both Marie Curie and the Brain Tumour Charity have highlighted strong concern about inadequate support for carers and the impact on the care journey that carer breakdown in these circumstances can have, often leading to emergency hospital admission. What action are the Government taking to ensure that people with brain tumours, their carers and their families receive care and support that meets their needs and wishes?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble Baroness has raised a very important issue. Obviously, the Government are working to deliver the Carers Action Plan, which retains the strategic vision of recognising, valuing and supporting carers. It includes a commitment to 64 actions across five priorities to ensure that we improve support for carers, including recognition and support, and build evidence to improve outcomes, especially in these very difficult areas. We are also working hard with the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission to ensure that we improve pathways for those with very challenging brain tumour diagnoses.

**Lord O'Shaughnessy (Con):** My Lords, I declare an interest as a patron of the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission. The noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, has highlighted a very important topic, because the outcomes and experiences of people with brain tumours and brain cancers are terrible and have not improved in decades. The actions my noble friend has set out are important, but it took the leadership of our late and much missed noble friend to galvanise action. Part of that action was a pledge from the Government of £40 million from the National Institute for Health Research to improve research into treatments, therapies and care for people with brain tumours. Can my noble friend update the House on what progress has been made on that and how the money is being spent?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I thank my noble friend for his question and I pay tribute to his leadership on this issue. He is absolutely right that we must improve outcomes for those diagnosed with brain cancer, and one of the ways of doing so will be through earlier diagnosis. That is why the Prime Minister announced measures with the aim of seeing 75% of all cancers detected at an early stage by 2028 to save 55,000 lives a year. My noble friend is right, however, that we will deliver this only through improved research specifically targeted at brain cancers. The Government announced £40 million over five years for brain tumour research. This can be delivered only through the submission of high-quality research and I know that the Tessa Jowell mission is working to ensure that that becomes a reality.

**Baroness Jolly (LD):** My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, outlined a perfectly reasonable list of requirements and I am pleased that they all fall within

the NHS long-term plan. However, “long-term” is slightly ill defined—by when will all these requirements be met?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** We are working to deliver earlier diagnosis to improve survival of 75% of cancers by 2028. We are also working to improve the one-year survival rates of adults diagnosed since 2016 over the next 10 years. We are also making sure that we improve the commitment of the £40 million over the next five years. I hope that answers the noble Baroness’s question.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB):** My Lords, I am a vice-president of a hospice in Exeter which is raising money to provide 24-hour care at home. Does the Minister recognise how important it is for those in palliative care, particularly those with brain cancers, to be able to spend the rest of their lives—and die—at home?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble and learned Baroness is quite right that people should have a choice in end-of-life care. The long-term plan recognises that we need to improve that choice and the quality of discussions around it. That is at the heart of the drive to improve personal health budgets and help staff identify personalised care planning for end-of-life care. I hope that reassures the noble and learned Baroness that this is seen as a top priority in end-of-life care planning.

**Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister has mentioned NHS support, but she will know that by far the majority of support for carers in these circumstances comes from local authorities. How does she react to all the current research showing that not only are services diminishing for carers in local authority areas but also the number of assessments, in contradiction to obligations under the Care Act and the carers action plan?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble Baroness will know that this has been identified as a priority, not only from the call to action from carers themselves that services and systems that work for them should be improved, but also because it is one of the 64 actions in the carers action plan. It is something the Government are determined to take action on. We are concerned by the reports and taking action to improve it.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con):** My Lords, has my noble friend noticed that at its conference the Labour Party adopted as its policy on social care pretty well the recommendations of the all-party Economic Affairs Committee of this House? Is there now a unique opportunity for us to get a political consensus on the need to provide free personal care? The root of this problem is that access to free personal care depends on diagnosis, not need. Is it not now time for the Government to produce a White Paper and work with the Opposition to produce the consensus that everyone concerned with this matter realises needs to be achieved?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I first congratulate my noble friend on his leadership on this issue; it has been noted by the House and very much welcomed. He is absolutely right that leadership on

social care is essential and that it is time for action on this. The Prime Minister has been clear that he wants to end the suffering in social care once and for all, and will bring forward announcements on his immediate plans for that very soon.

## Polio: Pakistan and Afghanistan

### Question

11.22 am

Asked by **Baroness Sheehan**

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what progress has been made to eradicate polio in (1) Pakistan, and (2) Afghanistan.

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Baroness Sugg) (Con):** My Lords, Pakistan and Afghanistan are the last countries in the world with cases of wild poliovirus. Conflict and inaccessibility make delivering the polio vaccine to all children there very difficult. Nevertheless, we assess that there has been good progress. The eradication programme is deploying new strategies to ensure that no one is left behind, such as tackling misinformation about vaccine safety head-on. The UK remains steadfast in its resolve to rid the world of this debilitating disease.

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** I thank the Minister for her response. We are on the cusp of eradicating polio and Pakistan and Afghanistan are chief among the very few problem areas that remain. One reason for this is the attacks by anti-vaxxers; tragically, in April this year a vaccinator and two security men were killed in Pakistan. Today is World Polio Day and I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to them and all aid workers everywhere who continue to risk their lives. What urgent action are we taking together with the Government of Pakistan to quell fears about the polio vaccine?

**Baroness Sugg:** I thank the noble Baroness for her question—on World Polio Day, as she highlighted. I am absolutely in agreement that we must ensure that those trying to bring life-saving support to the most vulnerable are not subject to violence. She is sadly right that we have seen attacks on vaccinators both in Pakistan and Nigeria, and we are working very closely with Governments to ensure that those attacks stop. We are also working with religious and traditional leaders to ensure that these people are kept safe. We have recently seen a very welcome fatwa issued supporting Pakistan’s polio vaccination programme in an effort to end that violence.

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, are the Government aware of the recent outbreak of polio in the southern Philippines, where there have been two confirmed cases and a number of tests are outstanding which might produce more confirmed cases? Is this not the result of protracted conflict in Mindanao and the resulting poor health and vaccination services, and does the international community need to do more to ensure that areas affected by conflict and the poor local health services that result do not suffer these outbreaks of polio that can then spread the disease much further than Afghanistan and Pakistan?

**Baroness Sugg:** The noble Lord is quite right; we have recently seen two confirmed outbreaks of vaccine-derived polio in the Philippines, which is such a shame, coming 20 years after the country eradicated that disease. We are running a campaign in the Philippines, in collaboration with the WHO and UNICEF, to launch a widespread immunisation campaign to give millions of children the polio vaccination there. The noble Lord is quite right that we must ensure that we continue to invest in water, sanitation and hygiene in the poorest parts of the world to ensure that this disease is not spread. It also shows that we must not take our foot off the pedal on this; we have seen a country that has not had an outbreak in 20 years suffering, so we must continue until we completely eradicate this disease.

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** My Lords, as has already been said, today is World Polio Day. Will my noble friend join me in paying tribute to Rotary International for being in the forefront of the work on eradication for over 30 years?

**Baroness Sugg:** I am very pleased that my noble friend highlights the work of Rotary International. As she said, it has been at the forefront of the work to eradicate polio for more than 30 years, and it is a founding member of the WHO Global Polio Eradication Initiative. I will certainly join my noble friend in paying tribute to it today and I sure that many noble Lords will want to do the same. Rotary International has contributed more than £1.3 billion to the global initiative, which includes more than £32 million raised in Great Britain and Northern Ireland alone. My Secretary of State, Alok Sharma, was pleased to attend an event with Rotary International yesterday, where he met fundraisers and survivors of the disease.

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, I welcome the strength of the commitment in the Minister's remarks today. Going the last mile and finding those most difficult cases—going from elimination to eradication—is a very expensive and difficult exercise. However, does the Minister agree that it is in fact an investment, which is the only protection for the world against the resurgence of such diseases? Therefore, will she also look at the Lancet Commission report on malaria eradication and the measures set out there, and again take that concerted approach that will allow us to rid the world of malaria? I declare my interest as chair of Malaria No More UK.

**Baroness Sugg:** The noble Baroness is right: the last mile is often the most difficult. We must not be complacent; we do have remaining challenges as we work towards complete eradication. We must continue the support from the UK and the international community on that. It is absolutely in the UK's interest and the global interest to ensure that we do not see the return of this disease. Some figures say that even within a decade, we will see hundreds of thousands of new cases if we do not continue this. We must also look at how we combat malaria as well—absolutely. We were pleased to make such a significant contribution to the Global Fund recently, but both the UK and international partners must work together to tackle these diseases.

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister is absolutely right that we must not take our foot off the pedal. Even in countries such as India, it is vital that we continue to support initiatives and ensure vaccination. I welcome the commitment to Gavi and other global partnerships. Can she tell us more how we will continue to support Gavi and such global partnerships to ensure that we not only halt the progress of these diseases but eradicate them forever?

**Baroness Sugg:** I will take a moment to highlight the great news today: the historic announcement that the world has been certified free of type 3 of the wild poliovirus. That significant achievement should help reinvigorate the process and provide motivation for the final step. The noble Lord is right to highlight both the Global Fund and Gavi; we must continue to contribute to these funds and work together. We are pleased that the UK will host Gavi next year in London and Liverpool, where we are looking forward to demonstrating our continued commitment and galvanising the international community to do more.

**Baroness Janke (LD):** My Lords, as the global polio eradication initiative winds down, what action are the Government taking to ensure that this transition does not undermine the achievements made so far?

**Baroness Sugg:** On World Polio Day, we should celebrate the success of the achievements so far—but, as I said, we must ensure that we continue on that. The transition point is very important. As was highlighted in the case of the Philippines, even 20 years after an outbreak we cannot be sure that it will not come back. So we must continue with the fight and continue with vaccinations and make sure that we reach the last, hardest-to-reach people—but we must ensure, as we transition, we hope, into a polio-free world, that it stays that way.

## Syria: British Armed Forces *Question*

11.30 am

*Asked by Lord West of Spithead*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether any British Armed Forces, in particular air assets, are involved in operations over Syria identifying and targeting ISIL.

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con):** My Lords, UK air assets are currently involved in operations over Syria as part of the global coalition against Daesh, and we remain fully committed to the coalition and the air campaign.

**Lord West of Spithead (Lab):** I thank the noble Baroness for her Answer. It is extremely worrying that our ally President Trump has turned that arena into an extremely dangerous place. There is no doubt that President Putin has a visceral dislike of NATO, yet the Turks, who are part of NATO, now have double digit SAM missile systems. These need the SIF settings, which enable a very special type of fire. Those settings are available to the Turks as members of NATO. Therefore, they are available to the Russian technicians

as well. Russians are working with the Turks on the border. This is highly dangerous, and I have real concerns. Our airmen, who have done a splendid job out there, have been put in a position where it is not at all clear who is actually controlling the air region—there is a threat from Turks as well as Russians and Syrians. This is a different situation. Are we absolutely sure that we have in place the mechanisms to ensure the safety of our brave airmen?

**Baroness Goldie:** I thank the noble Lord for making a very important point. He is absolutely right: this is a situation of turbulence and uncertainty, and implicit in that is great potential risk and danger. The United Kingdom has always been clear in relation to Syria as a whole that we want a political solution. We are focusing our attention on trying to deal with Daesh. Turkey of course remains an important ally within NATO. It may be reassuring to know that the Secretary of State for Defence is meeting NATO allies today and tomorrow, and north-east Syria will be very much on the agenda.

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** My Lords, can we assume from my noble friend's answers to the noble Lord, Lord West, that we continue to support our old friends and allies the Kurds in their efforts to fight ISIS, despite the fact that Turkey and Russia are now taking over control of the region?

**Baroness Goldie:** My noble friend raises an important point. We will be looking very closely at Monday's agreement between Turkey and Russia, including any impact on the local population. I make clear to the Chamber that the United Kingdom will not recognise any demographic change in Syria brought about as a result of deliberate attempts to force population changes. We are very clear that parties need to act on a properly negotiated and sensible basis.

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** My Lords, on 17 October our two NATO allies, the US and Turkey, agreed that operations must target only terrorists, their hide-outs, et cetera. Who do Her Majesty's Government understand the terrorists to be? In line with the question from the noble Lord, Lord Howell, can she reassure us that that does not include the Kurds, with whom we have been working in Syria? Even if our NATO allies identify some people as terrorists, we need to be sure that we support the Kurds.

**Baroness Goldie:** Let me be clear that the United Kingdom focus on Syria has always been on Daesh, which is a lethal, toxic threat. That continues to be where our efforts are focused.

**Lord Craig of Radley (CB):** My Lords, has the Minister seen the report that the mayor of Limassol, the town close to the Akrotiri peninsula, wishes to expand its tourism arrangements on to the peninsula and believes that it is time that the United Kingdom gave up the sovereign base area there? Have the Government reacted to these proposals?

**Baroness Goldie:** I should say to the noble and gallant Lord that the United Kingdom enjoys a very good relationship with the Republic of Cyprus, which includes a cordial relationship as regards our sovereign base areas. Of course, our sovereign base areas have been critical to our capability to endeavour to take action against Daesh in Syria.

**Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab):** My Lords, is it not clear that, as a result of President Trump's decision, we are witnessing a major geopolitical shift in the region in favour of Russia? What protocols or understandings are there with Russia to ensure that there is no clash between Russian planes and our own?

**Baroness Goldie:** I can reassure the noble Lord that we have set procedures for handling the airspace above Syria. He is right that, given the number of parties operating over Syria now, the airspace is congested, but that is no different from the conditions during earlier counter-Daesh operations. There are procedures to ensure that air activity is appropriately deconflicted and handled in a safe and professional manner. Those are the rules by which the United Kingdom abides, as do our allies.

**Lord Elton (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend has referred twice to Daesh, which is much bigger than ISIL. Events are moving very fast in the region, but Daesh goes by different names in many different parts of the world. Can she assure us that the Government are still firmly fixed on their main objective, which is the overall defeat of Daesh?

**Baroness Goldie:** Let me reassure my noble friend without any ambiguity or ambivalence that the answer is yes. Daesh is the focus of our activity. I said earlier that Daesh is a lethal, toxic entity, and we owe it to the safety and security not just of the United Kingdom but of our friends and allies throughout the world to play our part in addressing that threat.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, having said that, has the noble Baroness had a chance to read the report in this morning's *Times* by Anthony Loyd that the ISIS flag has again been flying above the al-Hawl camp where 68,000 family members of ISIS are held? Has she also yet had a chance to evaluate the list that I sent to her department naming jihadists who are now fighting alongside the Turkish army? Where does this leave the fight against terror and Turkey's membership of NATO, as well as our obligations to bring those who are responsible for this genocide against minorities, both in northern Iraq and north-east Syria, to justice?

**Baroness Goldie:** I am aware of the noble Lord's earlier inquiry and, if he will permit me to do so, I shall respond to him in more detail. I said earlier that these are turbulent, difficult and unpredictable times. The United Kingdom is clear that we must be consistent and resolute in our approach to these difficult circumstances. I emphasise that the focus of our activity is, if we can, to assist in a political solution within Syria but also, unequivocally, to deal with the continuing threat posed by Daesh.

## Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill [HL]

### First Reading

11.38 am

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

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

## Duty to Plan for Terrorism (Consultation) Bill [HL]

### First Reading

11.38 am

*A Bill to provide for consultation on the introduction of a Duty to Plan to require Category 1 responders to plan for terrorist threats and require those responsible for places to which the public have access to consider the vulnerability of those places to attack and take measures to mitigate any such vulnerability; and for connected purposes.*

*The Bill was introduced by Lord Harris of Haringey, read a first time and ordered to be printed.*

## Storage Period for Gametes Bill [HL]

### First Reading

11.39 am

*A Bill to provide for a review by the Secretary of State of the regulations governing gamete storage periods.*

*The Bill was introduced by Lord Patel (on behalf of Baroness Deech), read a first time and ordered to be printed.*

## Access to Palliative Care and Treatment of Children Bill [HL]

### First Reading

11.39 am

*A Bill to make provision for NHS service commissioners to ensure that persons for whom they have responsibility for commissioning physical and mental health services have access to specialist and generalist palliative care and support services; and to make provision for treatment of children with a life-limiting illness.*

*The Bill was introduced by Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, read a first time and ordered to be printed.*

## Elections (Candidates' Expenditure and Nominations) Bill [HL]

### First Reading

11.40 am

*A Bill to make provision for the regulation of election expenditure by candidates and political parties; to provide for the regulation of nominations as a parliamentary candidate and the abolition of deposits; to confer powers on the Electoral Commission; and for connected purposes.*

*The Bill was introduced by Lord Tyler, read a first time and ordered to be printed.*

## Business of the House

### Timing of Debates

11.41 am

*Moved by Earl Howe*

That the debate on the motion in the name of Lord Greaves set down for today shall be limited to 2 hours and that in the name of Lord Alton of Liverpool to 3 hours.

**Earl Howe (Con):** My Lords, in the absence of my noble friend the Leader of the House and on her behalf, I beg to move the Motion standing in her name on the Order Paper.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, I raise a small but important point about the allocation of time for Thursday debates. We have two debates today: one introduced by the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, on an important local government matter, and one on a very important international crisis in Hong Kong. The allocation of time for speakers in the first debate is 15 minutes, and in the second debate—in which two former Governors of Hong Kong are speaking—only five minutes. I believe it would be appropriate for the allocation and division of time in Thursday debates to be looked at.

**Earl Howe:** My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend. He is right to observe that Back-Bench speeches will be limited to 15 minutes in the first debate and five in the last. Because these are balloted and not party debates, we can move only 30 minutes from one to the other. In the normal course, we would have allocated equal time to both. We have given an extra half-hour to the final debate, so we have maximised the speaking time in that debate as best we can. I am sure my noble friend's remarks will not be lost in the usual channels.

*Motion agreed.*

## Brexit: Movement of Goods between Northern Ireland and Great Britain

### Statement

11.43 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Lord Callanan) (Con):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I will now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer given in the other place earlier today by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union:

“On 17 October the United Kingdom and the European Union reached political agreement on a new withdrawal agreement and political declaration for the future relationship. This includes a revised protocol for Northern Ireland/Ireland, which has been extensively debated in this House. This agreement is clear that Great Britain and Northern Ireland are one customs territory. Goods that are not at risk of moving to the European Union will attract no tariffs.

These arrangements mean that Northern Ireland would remain in the UK's customs territory and could benefit from the UK's new trade deals with third countries. For goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, those destined for the European Union will

have to comply with European Union rules. To ensure that the correct tariffs are applied and that goods comply with the rules of the single regulatory zone, some information will be needed on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

The deal also explicitly allows for the United Kingdom to ensure unfettered market access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. There will be minimal targeted interventions designed to prevent, for example, the trade in endangered species—something I would have thought this House agreed on. We will work with the European Union to eliminate these limited processes as soon as possible after Brexit.

The most important point is that these arrangements automatically dissolve after four years unless a majority of the Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont votes to keep them”.

11.44 am

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** Perhaps I may help the Government because I do not think they understand their own deal, which effectively ends the UK’s single market by imposing different tariffs and rules between Northern Ireland and Wales, Scotland and England. The Prime Minister keeps insisting that there will be no checks between GB and Northern Ireland, but Steve Barclay had to admit to our own committee that exit summary declarations will be required between Northern Ireland and GB. Today’s words were “minimal interventions”. Well, Mr Johnson, that means “checks”. The impact assessment says that some 215 million import and entry or exit declarations will be needed at a cost of between £15 and £56 each.

The Answer we have just heard states that the withdrawal agreement will ensure,

“unfettered’ market access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom’s internal market”.

However, if you look at the Bill—which some of us have to do—the word “unfettered” has disappeared and it allows for regulations to facilitate access to the market in Great Britain. Can the Minister come clean and admit that trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain will now be like sending something to a foreign country?

**Lord Callanan:** First, the noble Baroness is wrong: there will be no tariffs on goods from Northern Ireland to the UK. We have agreed these arrangements because of the unique situation of Northern Ireland. As we were told extensively when the original customs proposals were produced that this would result in checks in Northern Ireland, we compromised for the sake of getting a good agreement, which we were constantly urged to do. We have recognised the unique situation of Northern Ireland: we have provided a consent mechanism for Northern Ireland’s elected representatives to decide whether they wish to take part in these arrangements. Importantly, it ensures that there are no checks in Northern Ireland between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and that there are no borders. It is important to bear in mind that there are already checks because of the single epidemiological unit of Ireland—for example, on live animals going between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We are proposing

a small number of administrative checks and we will work with the European Union to ensure that these are as minimal as possible, if they are needed at all.

**Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD):** Will the Minister acknowledge that before this deal there was—and if this deal is accepted there will not be—friction-free movement between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK? In reality, businesses across the whole of Ireland will have to fill in tens of millions of forms to carry out the business they can do today without any such bureaucracy. This is hardly a free trade agreement of any validity. Is it not also a denial of the Government’s claim that the referendum was a UK-wide referendum that demanded a UK-wide solution? How dare a party that calls itself the Conservative and Unionist Party claim that it is defending the union when what it is actually doing is driving a coach and horses through it.

**Lord Callanan:** I do not agree with the noble Lord: Northern Ireland is leaving the EU with the rest of the United Kingdom. It was a UK-wide referendum. There will be no forms to fill in. We think that all these checks, if they are required at all, can be done electronically. However, as I said, a joint committee has been established in the withdrawal agreement. We will work with the European Union through the implementation period to ensure that these interventions are as minimal as possible.

**Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown (DUP):** On 8 December 2017, the then Prime Minister gave this emphatic unilateral commitment:

“There will be no new borders within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”.

How does the present Brexit deal square with that commitment? Have the Government not sacrificed Northern Ireland in the present deal in the interests of getting a deal for Britain irrespective of its implications for Northern Ireland? Are the Prime Minister and the Brexit Minister actually aware of what they have agreed to?

**Lord Callanan:** The noble Lord speaks with great authority on these points. We accept that we have compromised with the European Union to get a deal. We think that these arrangements will be acceptable. The consent mechanism is built into them, by which, after four years, elected representatives in Northern Ireland will be able to decide whether they continue. During the implementation period, we want to work with the EU and the Government of Ireland to make sure that this new procedure works as satisfactorily and smoothly as possible.

**The Earl of Kinnoull (Non-Affl):** My Lords, the European Union Select Committee held a public evidence session on Monday and the Secretary of State gave evidence. He was asked during that session whether Northern Ireland businesses sending goods to Great Britain would have to complete export declarations. In answer he said:

“Just to be clear, the exit summary declarations will be required in terms of Northern Ireland to Great Britain”.

My question to the Minister has a yes or no answer: does he stand by the words of the Secretary of State?

**Lord Callanan:** It is right that some administrative processes will apply to goods moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. In the coming months, we will work with the EU and the Irish authorities to make sure that we can eliminate those processes in the detailed implementation of the new agreement.

**Lord Lilley (Con):** My Lords, can the Minister confirm that the original withdrawal agreement included paper declarations A.UK for any exports from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, but that did not require the consent of the Northern Irish people? Can he further confirm that these documents are identical to those that Turkish imports into the European Union must fulfil, even though Turkey is part of a customs union, so the idea that a customs union obviates all border controls with the European Union is not true?

**Lord Callanan:** These are not customs controls; they are administrative checks that need to be made because of single market rules and single market membership. They are the result of international obligations that the EU implements through single market rules. However, my noble friend makes an important point.

**Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab):** My Lords, every individual consignment from an individual supplier on the UK mainland to every individual customer in Northern Ireland would, under the proposed scheme, be the subject of an individual customs entry, so 100 separate Northern Ireland deliveries from a UK-mainland supplier could be the subject of 100 separate customs entries, possibly under different tariff headings. How else can you control fraud?

**Lord Callanan:** I do not believe the noble Lord is correct about that. On the details of implementation and exactly how the arrangements will be implemented on the ground in practice, we want to work through the joint committee with the EU, Northern Irish and Irish authorities to make sure that implementation is as smooth and frictionless as possible.

**Lord Kilclooney (CB):** My Lords—

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, 53% of all goods and services for sale in Northern Ireland come from GB and 65% of all exports from Northern Ireland come to GB, resulting in 419,000 HGV crossings over the Irish Sea. I telephoned the Brexit imports and exports helpline this morning to ask what information was available to businesses conducting this trade and was told by the Government, “We have absolutely nothing on this. Sorry”. Will the Minister apologise for trying to ram through an agreement in three days in the House of Commons and in a short time in this House when no information would have been provided to Parliament or to Northern Ireland businesses conducting this business on the costs and burden inflicted on the UK internal single market?

**Lord Callanan:** I have made the point a number of times that we will work with the EU and the Irish authorities to make sure that these interventions and processes are as smooth and pain-free as possible.

However, I readily accept that to get an agreement and a good deal—as we have done and as we are constantly urged by the Opposition to do—we have to compromise. I think this is a good deal. We have worked collaboratively, as we have been urged to do. The Opposition told us that they did not want no deal; they wanted a deal. We have now concluded two different deals, both of which they keep telling us they do not like. The Opposition should just admit that the reality is that they do not want to leave the European Union at all—they do not want to implement the result of the referendum. I am pleased that the Liberal Democrats are happy to acknowledge that.

## Neighbourhood Services: Government Support

### *Motion to Take Note*

11.56 am

*Moved by Lord Greaves*

That this House takes note of the levels of government support for neighbourhood services provided by district councils and other local authorities.

**Lord Greaves (LD):** My Lords, in moving this Motion, I remind the House of my registered interest as a member of Pendle Borough Council.

I refer noble Lords and the Minister to previous debates that we have had on this matter and in which I have taken part. Having read what I said then, I simply reiterate that it is all still true, because the concerns that I put forward at that time, along with other noble Lords, have simply not been taken up by the Government. On 19 October 2017 there was a debate on the future availability of resources for the provision of district council services; a debate on local government finance generally was introduced by the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, in July 2017; and on 25 September this year I made a speech in the debate on the public spending review, which I shall refer to later. However, nothing has changed. Neighbourhood services continue to be the Cinderella of public services in this country. Things such as bin collection, street cleansing and local leisure facilities have less and less money spent on them every year, and the quality and quantity of what is happening, taken as a whole, is deteriorating.

These services comprise much of the work of ordinary district councils in two-tier areas—I am a member of one—but they are also carried out by unitary authorities, metropolitan councils and London boroughs. Some services, such as the maintenance of local highways, are carried out by county councils. However, the amount of funding provided and allowed for them by central government is the same whichever council carries them out, and it is going down. Indeed, an increasing number of these services are being provided by town and parish councils. In many areas, county, unitary and district councils are deliberately seeking to transfer some services to town and parish councils, which can levy an extra council tax to pay for them as an alternative to the services being closed down or seriously deteriorating.

We are told by our new Prime Minister that austerity is over, yet, as far as local government is concerned, the only real increases in funding, with a few exceptions,

are for social care. As we know, that itself is inadequate and the social care system is in serious crisis but, nevertheless, there is real extra money going to those authorities that deal with social care. For neighbourhood or street-level services, whether they are provided by districts or larger authorities, there is no extra money at all. In fact, in real terms, the money this year is being reduced yet again.

What are these services that people like me go on about? They include street cleansing—where sweepers and other people clean up litter—and litter removal generally, as well as the local highways and streets services which tackle the potholes that the Government panicked about last year. Other services include local traffic management, street lighting, pavements and housing standards. The increasing number of private landlords in many areas of poor housing mean that housing standards are a growing problem; housing stock that had been improving over several decades—50 years, perhaps—is now in many cases deteriorating again. There are services addressing environmental health, pollution control and antisocial behaviour measures, for which district councils have responsibility following legislation a few years ago. There are local public health initiatives and all the services that safeguard the local environment, with green spaces, local amenity areas and mini parks. All this concerns not only the green environment but the whole urban environment and any public spaces.

If the district councils and local authorities do not go out deliberately to look after these areas and keep them decent, they deteriorate. It is an easy thing not to do. We are talking about children's play areas, parks, leisure facilities, sports pitches and facilities, community centres and community facilities generally—the whole question of managing the local environment. Town centres, and towns, pose a huge problem at the moment; we are not talking about the big cities here but towns that may be large, small or medium sized. The local authority is very often the body that has to try to get a grip on maintaining viable, decent, properly maintained town centres. If it does not, who else will?

At the moment, there are lots of competitions that authorities can enter to get extra money for town centres, but they are competitions. People spend a lot of time and effort entering these competitions. Some win and get amounts of money—but resources are required for local authorities generally to look after their town centres, not just those lucky enough to win competitions. At a local level, the planning system is absolutely crucial for keeping areas as good places to live.

Refuse collection is on the front line of recycling, which is so important as part of climate initiatives. On community safety, councils may work with the local police and other bodies. The local authority has no duty to get involved but, if it does not, efforts will often not succeed. All this has a particular impact on ordinary districts, because this is what they do. It also affects everybody else and neighbourhood services everywhere.

The fabric of communities all over the country—not all of them, but many—is falling apart, as is the structure of the local services which maintain that fabric. There are rich areas and poor areas, and there

are areas which are more affected by this than others. As far as the climate emergency is concerned, local authorities have an absolutely crucial role to play. A large number—maybe over 200—have declared a local climate emergency, but without the resources to do things to tackle climate issues locally, across the wide range of everything they do, it will not come to anything.

On resources, according to the National Audit Office, since the 2015 spending review, districts have had a 13.9% reduction in core spending power in real terms. That feeds across to non-districts in relation to the services they carry out, which would otherwise be district services. Since 2010-11, the median reduction in core spending power for all districts is over 30% in real terms. For the worst-hit districts, including my own, it is 50% or more. If a local authority's spending power is cut by more than half over 10 years, it has a huge effect on what it can and cannot do. The areas that are affected are very often the poorest areas, because they are the ones which do not have the ability to raise extra money in other ways.

I raised this on 25 September in the debate on the public spending review. The Minister at that time, the noble Lord, Lord Duncan of Springbank, promised to write to me to explain how everything was happening. I have his letter here. It says:

“The Government also announced that it will consult on a 2% core council tax referendum principle, which will allow councils to access additional funding for their local services”.

We know that, but of course 2% is less than the rate of inflation. So it is not enough even on the amount to be raised by the council tax alone, and the amount from other sources is either static or has gone down. The Minister's letter also says that,

“local authorities should be able to make decisions to meet pressures where appropriate, informed by local knowledge, and be accountable for them”.

I am afraid that if that is what the Government are saying, it will result in a lot of belly laughs in a lot of local authorities.

I am not here to engage in any special pleading for my own local authority in Pendle, although I will mention as an example that the number of people employed by that authority has halved since 2010. Local authority services depend on employing people. There may be greater efficiencies—I am certain that there are—but when you slash your staff numbers by half and many of your remaining staff have gone down to a three- or four-day week, and you are trying to do the same things you did before, it is impossible.

The affected authorities are often old industrial towns in the north of England and elsewhere. Generally, they are places on the edge and in the areas in between. Even in the south-east, authorities are affected. We are not talking here about major cities, but about all the ordinary places that get missed out. I had better be careful about what I say with my noble friend Lord Goddard sitting in front of me, but the north of England is more than just Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.

One very good example is the new homes bonus, which was introduced to encourage local authorities to give planning permission for new housing. In practice, it top-sliced government money for all local authorities, including the poorest, and redistributed it to those

[LORD GREAVES]

that could build new houses, which were very often already in the pipeline. The truth is that it resulted in the redistribution of money from poor areas and areas where people did not want to build houses to places with high demand for houses and where new housing had already been planned and agreed. It resulted in a redistribution of funding from the north of England to the south-east, the south-west and the east taken overall, with individual exceptions, of course. Now that the new homes bonus has been cut, the top-sliced money has not been returned to the poorer areas from which it was taken in the first place.

I could talk for the whole of this debate, but I will not. The dark clouds of austerity still hang over far too many of the ordinary streets and roads, towns and communities of England. Further cuts are not sustainable. It is no wonder that people in many of these areas are fed up with the system, fed up with everything and vote for unicorns. Two years ago, in a debate in 2017, I said that things were “at breaking point”. They are not broken yet, thanks to the efforts of the staff, the councillors and everybody working in these areas, but it is pretty damned near broken. Something has to happen to put more resources into the ordinary services that people expect when they pay their council tax.

12.11 pm

**Baroness Redfern (Con):** My Lords, I am pleased to take part this afternoon. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, for moving this debate on government support to help local authorities fulfil their statutory duties and provide a good range of services to our communities. As the noble Lord alluded to, those services include education, child and adult social care, waste collection, public health, planning, housing, road maintenance and library services, and I too pay tribute to the excellent staff delivering them. It has certainly been a continuing challenge against a backdrop of successive Governments reducing funding for local government, as well as changed funding arrangements that place new pressures and demands, but local authorities have, to their credit, risen to the challenge and responded by opening up and creating new opportunities against possible further pressures for the sector.

In my allotted time, I will focus on libraries, which, in their own way, can be sometimes misunderstood or remembered only as a Cinderella service. That is far from the case. That is why I will concentrate my focus on the importance of libraries, which are continuing to strike out and innovate in our neighbourhood services offer.

I welcome too the local core spending power, which is estimated to increase by £2.9 billion in total in 2020-21, but of course, as I have alluded to, there are financial challenges for councils. I am therefore pleased that local government is demonstrating how it can deliver services, for now and for the future, and that authorities and many others are making an impact by working collaboratively and sharing those precious resources, as well as co-locating with other government, partner or voluntary services. Thinking outside the box is now a must for many councils, which I know are already working and delivering in new and different ways, and making the case for the importance of neighbourhood hubs.

Libraries play an integral part in community hubs. The libraries of 2019 are not the libraries we knew 10 or 20 years ago. They are diversifying, and have to diversify, their funding, generating income streams and developing new ones. They can often play a crucial role in revitalising or helping our high streets. They help remote workers and small businesses by renting out space or by co-locating in local sports facilities, as is happening in my local unitary authority. They can also offer to develop even outreach post offices within those hubs.

Of course, we always need well trained, experienced staff, but at the same time it is amazing to see that the number of library volunteers has increased by 187% over the past seven years. Importantly, that opens up opportunities to encourage those volunteers who may be lonely and suffer from social isolation, or those they know who may be lonely, to participate in some form of further education or to join in other activities.

Many libraries have spare floor space that they can turn around by offering residents the use of online services, helping them to improve their basic digital skills and thereby helping to reduce digital exclusion. Community hubs are also the place to go for accessing all local authorities' resources and activities.

In 2019, lending books is not all that libraries do, although it is important to be able to continue that service for young and old. They also offer a wide range of health and other social activities, as well as a place to meet or to study.

In North Lincolnshire, our libraries link with arts and cultural organisations, increasing people's access and participation, and inform people of future cultural events. A must, though, is to continue ongoing dialogue with customers regarding their possible future demands. In our neighbourhood hubs, we also offer the opportunity to display community collections; the translating of information resources into other languages; a programme of physical and social well-being activities for adults; programmes and advice for those who want to make positive sustainable changes to their health, such as weight management and stopping smoking; health checks; and, in particular, activities for young people. It is about having a building that is designed to allow multiple community groups to use it at the same time, where its many doors are all open.

This is where our CallConnect buses come into play—a service with no fixed timetable but which responds instead to passenger requests made by telephone or online. It improves transport opportunities in our rural communities, and some market towns, where there is an infrequent conventional bus service. And it works, together with the confidence that comes from the pooling of local authority budgets, rather than just thinking in silos. I welcome what the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, said earlier about support for a national bus strategy and long-term funding for transport.

Neighbourhood services are a core aspect of our communities and of how we continue to engage with and improve service delivery in our many different geographical council areas, and from council to council. The multi-year funding settlement has allowed councils to plan ahead. However, the four-year settlement is now coming to an end, which is resulting in uncertainty.

Local government needs clarity for future investment, so I ask the Minister if he can update the House on possible future developments.

12.19 pm

**Lord Adonis (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness. Her remarks about community bus services, having new request bus services and refashioning libraries as community hubs, and co-locating other community services, were extremely well made. It is vital that we deal with underfunding, but it is also important that we get the best value from the resources, the infrastructure and the funding that is currently available, and redesigning services along the lines that she was discussing in relation to Lincolnshire, which she knows well, is a point well made.

I have a gentle criticism of the noble Lord, Lord Greaves. He said that there were problems, “even in the south-east”. Can I inform my noble friend that there are many problems in the south-east, and most of the issues that he talked about apply equally to London and the south-east as other parts of the country? It is a very bad idea for us to be setting the north against the south, as if somehow the south is a land of milk and honey and the north is all starved. These problems are fairly common across the north and the south, and many of the issues which the noble Baroness referred to about redesigning services are equally important in the south-east.

Recently I visited the wonderful new library and community centre run by Oasis, a brilliant charity run by the outstanding community leader the Reverend Steve Chalke in Waterloo, in the London Borough of Lambeth. He has turned a library that was threatened with closure into a community centre. It also has a school and a debt advice service. The police station next door, sadly, is being closed, and Oasis is hoping to bring that into the community hub, too. There is a community centre and a café there. It is a vibrant community service that has enabled the local authority, working in partnership, to keep open a service that would have been closed even without the cuts which the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, referred to. What we need to do—this is part of the role that noble Lords in this House can play—is showcase successful models of delivery, even though politically some of us would like to see fundamental changes in national policy, so that we can make the best of what we have got and utilise our still-rich panoply of local community institutions and infrastructure to provide still-better services.

I of course agree with the substance of what the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, says. We need to join up the big picture here. Part of the reason why we are going through this Brexit crisis, and a massive crisis of confidence in our political institutions and our Government, is because the services on which people depend, all of those neighbourhood services, street collections, libraries, schools, housing—which I will have more to say on—have been seriously cut back in recent years, and people make a connection between the two. They think that the fact that they are getting such a raw deal in terms of their local services is part of the reason why they should lack confidence in their national Government. Alas, three and a half years ago the only question they were asked in a referendum was: “Do you want to

leave the European Union?” They are now taking it out on politicians, particularly in communities more distant from London, such as Lincolnshire and parts of the north, that voted to leave.

It is very clear to me that, if we are going to deal with the massive crisis that we face as a country, we have to end austerity and fundamentally invest in our local communities—particularly poorer communities—and stop Brexit. We need to do the two together. It is a somewhat sad commentary on our failure in Parliament to put these together that this debate is so poorly attended, with so few of your Lordships taking part—because we must crack this issue of investment in local services. I am delighted to see that my noble friend Lord Kennedy is replying to the debate. He is a distinguished local councillor. Of the few of us who are here today, many are distinguished leaders of or have played parts in local authorities. Unless we can get this right, we are not going to crack the bigger problem of our whole relationship with Europe and our membership of the European Union.

I want to address the issue of housing. The speech by the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, was interesting and revealing. He talked about improving housing administration and the quality of local authority housing stock, but I suggest that that prospectus is not bold enough for the future.

**Lord Greaves:** I apologise for intervening, but we have plenty of time today. I was talking not about local authority housing but about private sector landlord housing in areas of poor housing.

**Lord Adonis:** The point is the same, my Lords. If we are to tackle this housing crisis, what is needed is a bold new programme led by district councils and lower-tier authorities—because they are housing authorities—of building new council housing. They should work in partnership with housing associations to improve dramatically the stock of social housing and affordable housing, which is a significant part of the social crisis that the country faces.

One of the biggest changes in public policy over the past 40 years has been that the provision of social and affordable housing, which was regarded as a core function of the state until the 1980s, has totally ceased to be. We need to be self-critical in this: I do not think that the Government of which I was a part did nearly enough. We thought that market-based solutions would meet needs for lower-cost housing; they manifestly have not.

I spent, for my sins, a large part of last night reading the third volume of Charles Moore’s biography of Margaret Thatcher, which I recommend to your Lordships—indeed, some of those whom I see here in the House today feature in it. It is an important contribution to political history. One of the most remarkable things about it is that council housing, which used to be one of the biggest political issues in the 1960s and 1970s, does not feature at all in that volume—it covers the years from 1987 to the end of Lady Thatcher’s career—except in one passing reference to council house sales, which was the only council house policy that Margaret Thatcher had in her 11 and a half years in Downing Street.

[LORD ADONIS]

The facts are now the facts: the average home in England this year costs eight times more to buy than the average salary; the average share of income that young families spend on housing has trebled over the past 50 years; because of the shortage of social and affordable housing, the number of people living in the private rented sector has doubled in the past 20 years, and private renters spend on average 41%—nearly half—of their household income on rent. Surprise, surprise, a majority, 57%, of private renters are now struggling to pay housing costs, and one in three low-earning renters has to borrow money to pay their rent. Some 800,000 people who are renting cannot afford to save even £10 a month; 27% of private renters receive housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit, which is approximately 1.3 million households nationwide. Meanwhile, the Government spend £21 billion a year on housing benefit because of the very high level of rents, which they have jacked up by removing subsidy and not building more social homes. Last year, only 6,463 new social homes were built nationwide. There are about 1.5 million fewer social homes today than there were in 1980.

I do not want to do death by statistics, but I think that your Lordships get the picture. What has essentially happened in the last generation is that we totally stopped building new social homes publicly. Housing associations filled the gap to a very modest extent, but not nearly sufficiently. We have had significant population growth in that time, alongside the cessation of social home building; a substantial proportion of the country cannot get near the affordable housing ladder, let alone buy housing; and we have a private rented sector in which Rachmanite, disgraceful, slum-type conditions are increasingly common, with local authorities having neither the power nor the resources to deal with them.

What should be the policy? It is very clear to me, because to all big questions there is usually a simple and correct answer—there is often a simple and wrong answer, too. The simple and correct answer to this crisis is for local authorities to start building social housing again. They should do this in partnership with housing associations, but they should be the prime movers because they are the public authorities—and they should build social housing at the level at which they did in the 1960s and 1970s, to deal with the chronic housing crisis.

At the moment there is precious little movement towards this. It is true that councils are building houses again in a very modest way, compared to the period from the mid-1980s until a few years ago when they were building none at all. But it is very modest; it is scratching the surface, and we now need a revolution in policy. To give some idea, the London Borough of Lambeth, for which I was looking at the statistics recently, is building fewer than 100 new social homes a year; it needs to build 1,000-plus to deal with this issue. So we need about a tenfold increase in the rate of new building at the moment. To put that in context, in just that one London borough, Lambeth—I am sorry to keep referring to London and the south-east, which may offend the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, but there are big problems there, too—the council house waiting list is 28,000. That is in a London borough that is able

to build fewer than 100 new homes a year. We need to move these two figures much, much closer to each other.

The noble Viscount, who always does his best to reply to our debates, will I hope be able to give us some facts, and I would like to put a few questions to him. The situation that we are in now, which I have seen very often in public policy, is that everyone admits there is a problem—I do not think that anyone who follows me in this debate will say that there is not a big problem—but the difficulty that we face is that the policies do not remotely match the scale of the problem that most people have identified. At the moment, the noble Viscount and his party are in government, so this is a charge which faces them as to what they are doing about it. They have accepted that there needs to be new social housebuilding, but they are doing precious little about it.

I have three specific questions about policy. First, if there is to be significant new housebuilding led by local authorities, it can come from only one of two sources: either grant funding from central government and/or the capacity of local authorities themselves to borrow in advance of the receipts that they will get from then renting out the social housing. Of course, it was a combination of the two that produced the scale of council and social housebuilding in the 1960s and 1970s. The Government have introduced two policies in this respect. They have restored some grant funding to local authorities in respect of housing, but the amount is pitifully small and typically provides only for less than one-third of the cost of new social units. So what is the Government's policy going forward? Are they going to significantly increase grant funding in respect of new social housing provided by local authorities and, if so—since I am told that unless that grant funding is in excess of 50%, it is very difficult to get building at volume—will the Government be prepared to look at increasing the grant funding to 50% of the cost of providing new social housing?

In respect of borrowing, the situation is more urgent. What we are seeing at the moment is a serious regression in policy on the part of the Government. One of the most welcome things that Theresa May did in her time as Prime Minister was announce an end to the borrowing cap in respect of local authorities building new housing. This was a deeply felt restraint on local authorities that had applied for the best part of a generation. Even though they could borrow cheaply from the Public Works Loan Board—which was the way that local authorities borrowed—and were able to service debt from rents to build new social housing, they were banned from undertaking the borrowing. Theresa May lifted that borrowing cap, which was extremely welcome, but earlier this month the Government announced unilaterally, with no consultation—smuggled out in a Statement on one of those many days when there were many other Brexit-related announcements so that almost no one noticed—that the borrowing rate from the Public Works Loan Board was going to be increase overnight from 1.81% to 2.82%.

We should let that sink for a moment: an increase of nearly 50% overnight in the borrowing rate levied on local authorities in the only place that they can borrow—

except at the going market rates, which of course would make all of this totally unaffordable. The word on the street, which I put to the noble Viscount so that he can deal with it when he replies, is that the reason this was done is that the Treasury, which never wanted the borrowing cap lifted in the first place, is now trying to sabotage the whole principle of public borrowing by local authorities by massively increasing the interest rate, hoping that no one will notice.

I was, until the Brexit crisis came along, chairing the National Infrastructure Commission, so I know only too well how the Treasury works in these matters. That interpretation of what is happening seems to me to be extremely plausible. Can the noble Viscount tell the House why the borrowing rate from the Public Works Loan Board for local authorities wanting to borrow to build new housing has been increased from 1.81% to 2.82%? Is this a fixed policy? Finally, because I am always trying to be constructive—and I know the noble Viscount is, too—will he consider reviewing that policy? Will he meet me and other noble Lords who are concerned about this issue to discuss public borrowing by local authorities to build new social housing and how it can be done on an affordable basis?

**Lord Marlesford (Con):** Is the noble Lord satisfied that there is space in Lambeth to provide housing for 28,000 more people? It is all very well to say that we have to provide housing for people who need it, but if you are talking about a particular area they want to live in, there has to be the space for the housing.

**Lord Adonis:** Yes, I am satisfied, and I would be very glad to do a walking tour of the London Borough of Lambeth to explain to the noble Lord how it can be done, starting with the huge issue of the redevelopment of Waterloo station. It desperately needs redeveloping; Waterloo is the biggest terminus in Europe and if it were redeveloped it could provide huge opportunities for new social housing. If the noble Lord is up for it, we will do it and we will work out how we can provide that housing—and I would like the Minister to come along, too, because then something might actually happen.

12.35 pm

**Lord Goddard of Stockport (LD):** My Lords, far be it from me to interrupt the private arrangements of the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, but I too am grateful to my noble friend Lord Greaves for securing this timely debate. I hope I will not tread on his toes with my comments, but I want to build on what the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, said about more collaborative working, as well as on the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Redfern, about the need for libraries.

I begin with the position of local councillors, because they are at the other end of the spectrum. To give a brief example, in a previous life, as a young councillor in Stockport, I collected the diaries of Tony Benn. They are an interesting insight into being in government, in opposition and—as at the unfortunate time when I got the book—in what are called the wilderness years; the term is quite apt at the moment. I got my copy and went up to Manchester to get him to sign the book for me. He found out that I was a councillor and said,

“I really feel sorry for you, because local councillors have the worst of all worlds. You’re not MPs and you’re not Ministers. You get all the money from government and you have no power. If something goes right, the Government claim it. If something goes wrong, you get blamed for it locally”. It was a position he would not have wanted to be in. I left with my shoulders down, thinking that my career was starting on a pessimistic note. Having said that, we carried on and we petitioned the Government. All Members here who have been in local government have probably made the trek on the train, with the chief officers, to meet a Minister for a nice drink of tea and a biscuit. They will have received the warm words and been sent back on the train—another day of your life gone when nothing happened. That was the never-increasing circle of how local authorities used to work.

Fast forward another 15 or 20 years, and I became leader of Stockport Council, albeit in a different political party—I was in the Liberal Democrats by then. I was determined to change the perception of local councillors and to try to affect the funding formula, because it was the funding formula that was always the problem. As fate would have it, devolution was coming to Greater Manchester. There was an appetite and a belief that we could do things differently and more collaboratively to get more bang for our buck. That was thanks to Howard Bernstein, Richard Leese and one or two others. We 10 councils stuck together and decided to pool our wits and, more importantly, our money, and we got the first ever city deal, the first ever combined authority and the first ever LEP in the country.

We are seeing the benefits of that now: Greater Manchester gets a £7 billion health budget in one lump sum. Those 10 leaders distribute that on the basis of need, instead of it being salami-sliced, with every council not getting enough. The ability to do that is really what I want to talk about. It can filter down even to a local council such as Pendle, and to small authorities and district councils. If there is a will to work together, we can get better bang for our buck, but there needs to be more trust and we need more faith in each other: we need to believe that this is for the greater good.

Today, LGA surveys paint a different picture of councillors. When asked, “Who do you trust to deliver local services?”, 75% answered local councillors, 12% MPs and 12% government. I will not read the percentage for government Ministers for fear of embarrassment, but be assured that it was a single digit. The irony is that local councillors now get less funding, have more public trust and have to deliver worse services. Quite frankly, I am glad I do not have to be involved in that.

I make the following observations on this timely debate. Government funding comes in strategic and non-strategic forms. We know what strategic funding is for: services for older people and children’s services—the essentials. But non-strategic funding is just as important, for libraries, heritage and sport. These are the services that take the brunt now because other services have to be protected. But more people a week now go to libraries than to Premier League football matches. They are no longer dusty old places where pensioners

[LORD GODDARD OF STOCKPORT]

go for a drink of tea. They are learning hubs and fantastic assets to local authorities, and they should be protected.

There are other things local councils can be involved in. The creative industries are worth £84 billion a year and include museums and places that can attract people who spend the money that creates the jobs in your economy. The tourism industry is worth £127 billion. These are big numbers and local authorities should be getting their slice. If you are a bit more imaginative about partnership working, you can begin to get some of that money back. It is not all doom and gloom, but the Government are not going to change the funding regime overnight—it is not going to happen. We have to be smarter and cleverer about how we stretch that money.

I want to talk about the housing plan of the noble Lord, Lord Adonis. I am not saying that in Stockport we have a silver bullet, because we do not, but over 20 years ago we sat down with five local social housing providers and we offered them land for free—we gave it up. They built the houses and we put the tenants in. We built thousands of houses that way in Stockport, to such an extent that, when it was finished, they came back and said, “We’ve actually have a surplus, so we can either reduce the rent or build some more”. We said, “Build some more!”. That model worked, even then, and I see no reason why it should not work now. We now have Stockport Homes, an arm’s-length company. It has enormous headquarters with a board, and is building homes in Stockport town centre, where you need to build homes and can really connect communities. It is not building flats but one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom houses, in town centres where people come to work and thrive. When you do that, you begin to get an economy, and it is the dividends from that economy that bring things forward.

My two thoughts, for what they are worth, are these. Government is almost like Newton’s theory: for every action, there is a reaction. As you cut and make things more difficult—fewer police, less youth provision, fewer parks and recreation facilities—the people affected by that will do something else. In my opinion, that something else will cost more. If we can turn that egg-timer over and get it going back the other way, toward investment, that is how we can have more social cohesion, fewer gangs, less theft and less lack of respect for property and people. It can be done.

It does not happen automatically for local councils. But my noble friend is right that, for somewhere such as Pendle or a small district council in the south, you can make a difference if you work together with other people. You have to understand that, sometimes, you have to put tribal loyalties aside—perhaps I will get into trouble with my Whips for saying that. We are here for one thing: to serve the people. We have to deliver services for local people as best we can. There is no money tree, but if we work together correctly across political parties, as we have done in Stockport for years, we can move forward.

Finally, on sport, Bury Football Club is going out of business, and the effect that will have on the economy in Bury will be critical. Stockport was in a similar position. The Liberal Democrat group supported

Stockport County and the Labour group now running Stockport do the same. We secured the Stockport County ground. Stockport County’s average gate at home is about 3,000 to 4,000, plus away people, so every other week the economy of Stockport and Edgeley gets 4,000 people in the cafes, bars and food places. People need to understand that. They say, “Football clubs—nothing to do with us”, but clubs in small towns are just as important as factories. I make a plea to people. When they say, “Oh, Bury Football Club—too bad. How sad”, that is not the answer. You need to give it support. I understand that there are upwards of 20 football clubs on the edge, and if 20 more go, we really will see a decline in town centres and in living standards. We should resist that.

12.45 pm

**The Earl of Listowel (CB):** My Lords, may I speak briefly, for four minutes perhaps if I am permitted, in the break? I thank the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, for calling this important debate. In listening to what has been said, I reflect on the difficulties politically that we have been facing for quite some time now. We seem to be talking about a lack of stability and extremism, moving from “spend, spend, spend” to “cut, cut, cut”. We talk about the decision to stop building social housing and sell it off, and the consequences of that. I compare that to a country like Germany, for instance, which obviously has its own challenges, but it seems to have achieved a level of stability and continuity of policy over time. Looking at that from the point of view of children, young people and families, what they need above all is continuity and stability. Perhaps, therefore, the current crisis may be an opportunity to think about whether we might do politics a little differently in this country, being a bit more collaborative and consistent and a bit less confrontational and adversarial.

I will address three points briefly: housing, young people and the funding of strategic services. The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, spoke eloquently about housing. Over the years, I have spoken with mothers in temporary accommodation, and it has been troubling to hear of their experience, most obviously of isolation. So often, because of the shortage of housing, they are placed a long way from their community—perhaps their ethnic community—and their family and friends, so they struggle because of that. They struggle with great uncertainty. I was speaking with a woman who had experienced domestic violence over many years. She had finally managed to escape from her husband, spent some time in a refuge and was then in temporary accommodation. She spoke of her great anxiety that she might be placed way outside London, where she had lived for many years and brought up her family. Obviously, this was impacting on her mental health, and brought with it the risk that her granddaughter, whom she was caring for, might be removed into local authority care. That is perhaps another reason for us to wish to remain in the European Union or to rejoin it. The housing issue, which people on the continent seem to address far better on the whole, is perhaps just one example of the success of the social contract there, which we seem to have been struggling with for many years. In the United States, which we seem now to be turning towards, they have a very shaky social contract.

On young people, the BBC recently produced a report on children and young people in Barrow-in-Furness. For many years, young people have been struggling there—there have been issues to do with drug and alcohol misuse—and the programme highlighted that younger and younger children are being drawn into evening activities around drinking, often turning up to school when they are unable to concentrate and falling asleep. We also have the continual worries about children and young people being involved in knife crime. Most of the victims of knife crime are young people themselves. I once worked in a hostel where I met a young black woman serving the food whose son had been knifed just recently, and we saw the impact that had on her.

I welcome the efforts that the Government are making to address that, but I worked for three years in various local authorities across London with children and young people—from 1982 to 1985, I think. I went with my gang of local young people to the local swimming pool and we made use of local parks. We need consistent investment in those assets for children and young people. We need to invest in youth services. I was sorry to hear that Pendle has lost half of its workforce. There are two key things if one wants to keep young people out of crime: you need to give them something to do, and you need to give them someone responsible and helpful to whom they can look up to do it with. In a sense, you are making a little gang of your own, you are doing something interesting together and they have a good person to do it with.

Finally—I may have spoken for too long already—is it reasonable to expect local taxpayers to fund strategic services, such as children's services? Surely the Government need to invest more in children and family services from the national budget so that local taxpayers do not have to pay for children's homes and the costly interventions that are a statutory duty on local authorities to deliver.

12.50 pm

**Baroness Pincock (LD):** My Lords, I draw the House's attention to my registered interests as a councillor and a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I thank my noble friend Lord Greaves for initiating this important debate on the current state of, and future prospects for, neighbourhood services. I also draw the House's attention to the fact that our Benches are less full than they would have otherwise been because today many are attending the funeral of a very special Liberal Democrat.

The National Audit Office produced an excellent report last year on the financial sustainability of local authorities. The data provided in the report admirably illustrates the spending cuts meted out to neighbourhood services. It states that there has been a 49.1% real-terms reduction in government funding since 2010, which translates into a 28.6% real-terms cut in spending power. However, that paints only part of the picture, as there is considerable variation between local authorities. For example, metropolitan and unitary councils have seen a 38% cut in spending power on non-social care services, and the shire districts a 25% cut. Even then, there is huge variation within those figures. As my noble friend Lord Greaves demonstrated, areas of greater deprivation are less able to raise funding through

local taxation, thus the cuts there have been even greater. Fifty per cent is a huge cut in any local authority's funding to provide services.

Further detail of service cuts in this invaluable report shows that libraries have experienced cuts of 33%, parks 27%, community safety 51% and highway maintenance 37%. The LGA survey of public perception last year shows that resident satisfaction rates with services is falling and, for highway maintenance, falling quite sharply—no surprise there for anyone who has to use local roads. The service cuts are becoming increasingly obvious to our residents.

What does that mean in practice for people who are, after all, paying more and more in council tax for less and less? Local authorities have protected spending on vulnerable adults and children in local authorities with those responsibilities, and focused budget cuts on neighbourhood services. In my own council of Kirklees, this has resulted in, for example, the Red House Museum being closed. It was the home of a close friend of Charlotte Brontë and features significantly in her novel *Shirley*. Of course, local people want to keep the Red House open to the public and a recent petition attracted more than 3,000 signatures from all over the world in a matter of days, but to no avail.

Libraries have been transferred for volunteers to run, while parks have much-reduced grass cutting, with some areas being neglected altogether. Local roads are in a poor state, as they are everywhere, with the Local Government Association reporting this year that funding available for the maintenance of local roads has dropped by £400 million. Across the country, residents have seen the closure of services such as libraries and museums, or a significant reduction in their opening hours, along with a considerable downgrading of the standard of service in, for example, parks and play areas. Provision has virtually disappeared in, for example, services for young people, or, as some people still call them, youth services. These cuts have been made by closing buildings and, in many cases, then selling those assets. In other cases, the service reduction has been achieved by cutting employees, as my noble friend Lord Greaves pointed out. We now have 34% fewer professional librarians than eight years ago and professional food safety inspector numbers have dropped by a staggering 60%.

The cuts to some neighbourhood services would be even worse if it were not for the increase in or introduction of fees charged by local authorities, as the report from the NAO clearly shows. Although it is difficult to be precise, the figures point to the fact that around 10% of the costs of providing neighbourhood services are now being borne by fees and charges, which means that in a sense they are just another tax on local people. Services are being diminished and the costs, either through taxation or charges, are rising as a direct result of the Government's savage cuts to local funding. Here I disagree with the comments of my noble friend Lord Goddard, who believes that all this could be transformed by greater collaboration and more efficient, effective working. Yes, some of that can happen and that action taken by local authorities during the austerity years has shown that services can be provided more efficiently and effectively. However, you cannot

[BARONESS PINNOCK]

keep cutting funding. In the end, public funding is an essential requirement for the delivery of public services.

The other way that councils have sought to manage the sharp reduction in funding is by increasing the number of volunteers. Volunteers are a huge asset to any council and enable local people to get involved and to shape service provision in a way that was not as readily available just a few years ago. Valuable though they are, however, volunteers cannot be expected to be completely responsible for council buildings or to take responsibility for running a service formerly provided by paid professionals. Volunteers are frequently drawn from the ranks of retired people, so the sustainability of a heavy reliance on them has to be questioned.

What are the consequences of these dramatic changes in public service provision? The impact on individual services is well documented in expenditure reductions, employee cuts, building closures, council tax rises and increases in fees and charges. What is not yet clear is the totality of the impact measured across a community. What the Government do not seem to appreciate is that councils are not simply the commissioners and providers of disparate services. All councils aspire to create healthy, safe and vibrant communities. Each of these service cuts has a different impact on individuals within a community: children who find that the football pitch is not being maintained to its former high standard; young people for whom diversionary youth services are appropriate, who now find alternative distractions, not always to their benefit or that of local people; readers wanting to use a now closed library, or unemployed people who need a library with public access to computers to complete job applications; and those suffering from mental ill health for whom a calming park or open space is a refuge, who find that it is now not as clean and well cared for. As for potholed roads, they are an unwelcome cost to individuals and businesses. Can the Minister let us know whether the Government have made an assessment of the cumulative impact on communities and individuals of this very significant reduction in neighbourhood services?

Parish and town councils in many areas have been able to take over the provision of some neighbourhood services to the benefit of local people. Can the Minister say whether the Government will actively encourage the creation of parish and town councils, including within metropolitan and unitary district council areas?

Neighbourhood services provide a vital lifeline for many individuals, as well as opening opportunities for those in more deprived communities. Flourishing communities with effective neighbourhood services help reduce demand for front-line services such as the NHS and social care. I hope the Government will begin to understand the enormous contribution of neighbourhood services to the well-being of local communities and begin to reverse the cuts in funding that have had a devastating impact on these much-valued and essential services. We on this side understand the vital nature of community services and will invest in them, and give powers to communities to make the decisions that affect them, for the well-being of all.

1.01 pm

**Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, first, I refer to my entry in the register of interests as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. Secondly, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, on securing this important debate.

The noble Lord, Lord Greaves, has vast experience in local government, which he clearly demonstrated with his introduction to this debate. He has raised the important issue of the levels of government resources for neighbourhood services provided by district councils and other local authorities. We have received some excellent briefing notes, which have been helpful in the preparation for this debate, from the Local Government Association, the Library of the House, the District Councils' Network and others, and I thank them all very much for that.

I join noble Lords in paying tribute to elected councillors and the staff of local authorities. As the noble Lord, Lord Goddard of Stockport, said, when you visit local government you see that the work that councillors do is so important. They are the glue that keeps things together. It is really important to respect and value the work they do.

Things have been tough financially, and it is due in no small measure to the dedication of people elected and working in local government that many more crises have been averted in recent years. A 32.6% cut in real terms in local authority spending in non-social care services between 2010 and 2017 has created huge pressures on councillors, staff and communities. Although I accept that there have been some increases recently, the National Audit Office's prediction is that, by the end of 2020, the reductions in funding from central government to local government will be 56.3%—a huge figure. Many organisations would have ceased to exist with a cut in expenditure of that level.

My noble friend Lord Adonis is absolutely right: we need to end austerity. We also need to stop Brexit. I agree with him in both respects. I am so pleased that the noble Lord, Lord Deben, is in the Chamber now. I recommend that noble Lords read yesterday's *Hansard*. His contribution on the regulations on the European elections in Gibraltar was marvellous, and every noble Lord should read it when they leave the Chamber.

Local government delivers a huge range of services, and district councils deliver 86 of the 137 essential services to cover 22 million people—40% of the population in England—and more than 68% of the country by area. They approve 90% of planning applications and enabled most of the housing completions in their areas in the last year. That gives noble Lords some idea of the work that district councils do. Those services and more are delivered by unitary authorities and, in the two-tier county areas, social services, education and other services are delivered by county councils.

The noble Lord, Lord Goddard of Stockport, was absolutely right when he spoke of the benefits of local authorities working together. Greater Manchester is a great example of that; it has seen much success. Regardless of the political control over those authorities—various parties have had control in different years—they have

continued to work together. As the noble Lord said, they have reaped the benefits of working together, and that is to their credit.

I agree generally with all that the noble Lord said in what was an excellent speech, and I fully support the points he made about Bury Football Club. What has happened there is tragic, and I support the local MP James Frith for the work he is doing. I had some problems with Dulwich Hamlet Football Club a year or so ago. We made some progress there, and the club is back in its place. Many noble Lords supported my campaign in the House, so I am grateful for that. I am also grateful that in Lewisham, where I live, the council and the new mayor saw the error of their ways and withdrew the CPO around Millwall Football Club. Hopefully, that club will go from success to success, with notable thanks to the campaigns by fans and local residents on its behalf.

The Motion from the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, raises the issue of government support for neighbourhood services. We know that local government gets most of its funding from three main areas: council tax receipts; retention of business rates; and central government grants. I have already outlined the huge cuts in resources provided by central government.

Let us just look at some of the issues that local government is dealing with, with reduced resources, such as housing and homelessness. Money provided to reduce homelessness is very welcome, obviously, but for me there is too much emphasis on the Homelessness Reduction Act without a corresponding increase in resources to make that very desirable outcome a reality. I have raised this many times in this Chamber. Councils need long-term funding in place to deal with the problem of homelessness on a sustainable long-term footing. I do not believe we have that yet. The number of homeless people when you come to this House from any of the nearby stations—Waterloo, Charing Cross or Victoria—or through Westminster Tube station is a tragedy. That was not the case some years ago, and the Government have to do much more about it. In its excellent briefing, the LGA estimated that homelessness services are dealing with cost pressures from demand and inflation alone of £100 million a year. Statutory homelessness continues to rise, and 1.1 million remain on council housing waiting lists. That will remain the case unless a long-term solution is found.

One of the most frustrating things I hear is that, somehow, the local authority planning department is some sort of barrier to building houses. This is utter rubbish. Councils approve nine out of 10 cases that come before them, yet approximately 250,000 applications are approved without a brick being laid. Every year they give permissions, and it is very frustrating to hear this. Also frustrating is the position whereby the council tax payer is still subsidising the whole planning process. The LGA and others have for many years called for that to be dealt with. There has been an increase in the fees, which obviously is welcome, but the Government were also consulting on a further 20% rise in planning fees and have not decided yet. They need to decide that. From this Dispatch Box I have also called for the Government to find just one council in England to pilot some sort of transparent scheme of local fee

setting and see where that goes. That could be very helpful. I cannot see the objection to finding one authority to pilot that and have a look at it.

As noble Lords have heard, waste and recycling services are important to local communities and are very much more in the public eye now. Since 2010, councils have continued to increase recycling rates, although central government funding for this has been reduced by about 60%. The Government's resources and waste strategy is a significant step in the right direction towards improving waste and recycling services, and the LGA has called for businesses and manufacturers to pay the full cost of recycling in their areas. Much more needs to be done to boost recycling rates, raise standards and meet national targets and to improve important services such as street sweeping, refuse collection, caretaking and cleansing services.

Local authorities are responsible for the majority of the estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces in the UK, but they are struggling to continue to maintain them. They have been exploring a range of models for maintaining them, including working with voluntary groups and trusts to generate income. Where I live in Lewisham, there are a number of initiatives to get local people involved in maintaining their local green space. These have been moderately successful, but they are no substitute for park keepers and their staff keeping the place clean, tidy and looking nice.

Councils in England run a variety of leisure facilities, including grass pitches, swimming pools, sports halls and various other amenities. It is important for people to keep active as they get older, because it is good for their physical and mental health, but these services are under pressure. Many facilities are ageing, particularly swimming pools, and need to be updated and made better.

I agree with the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Redfern, about community libraries. There are many good examples where local communities have taken over and run libraries. In Lewisham, there are good libraries at Crofton Park, New Cross and elsewhere run by the communities. They are providing community cafes and getting better footfall through the door but, again, these services are under pressure.

District councils are often responsible for maintaining key cultural infrastructure. They maintain the local heritage of their communities in local museums and afford residents the chance to see what is going on in their areas. The Mendoza review found that local authority museums were experiencing challenging circumstances. I grew up in Walworth, where the local museum was bequeathed to the borough by the Cuming family. It contains a valuable collection reflecting Southwark's history and is much loved by the local community. However, it also needs to be supported.

We have a social care crisis which the Government need to address with new additional funding, recognising that we are all living longer. That is good news but medical advances mean that we could live 10, 20 or 30 years longer, often with chronic conditions with which we will need help and support, and it is important that there are local services available for local people. It is important that we get an agreed cross-party

[LORD KENNEDY OF SOUTHWARK]

settlement on social care, which can stand the test of time, on how to fund these services. The issue cannot become a political football.

The noble Lord, Lord Greaves, referred to the new homes bonus. I have spoken before about the robbing Peter to pay Paul strategy of the Government—taking from one area to fund another area—and that cannot carry on.

My noble friend Lord Adonis is right about the crisis in housing. I grew up on a council estate in Walworth. The home was clean, safe, warm and dry. My mum and dad worked and paid their tax and rent until they retired, and we were happy there. That is not the case now for young families who are trying to get a home. They cannot get a council house and getting something they can afford is a huge problem. I now live in an ordinary terrace house in Lewisham, which I bought 15 years ago with my wife, the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of Cradley. I could not afford to buy the same house today—I could not afford the deposit or the mortgage payments—even though we are not badly off. People have that problem in many parts of our country.

My noble friend Lord Adonis has invited colleagues to go to Lambeth. I will invite them to come to Newham. I took the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, to Newham a few months ago, and he saw the great work being done by the council and the mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz, in tackling rogue landlords. The council is doing a good job, and the noble Lord was impressed by the council but shocked by what he saw of the conditions that people have to live in. When he asked about the rent they were paying, the reply was shocking. I know the noble Viscount will visit there and any other noble Lord will be welcome. We could perhaps organise a trip there together. It would be good for noble Lords to see the conditions that people have to live in today.

I mentioned briefly the new homes bonus. When the noble Viscount replies to the debate, perhaps he will tell the House where we are on that.

District councils provide a variety of services which have a positive effect on public health and the public generally. I believe in the old adage that prevention is better than cure. Keep-fit classes, swimming, walking and other events are helpful and are important local services. In bringing my remarks to a close, I again pay tribute to local council and local authority staff. They do a wonderful job under difficult circumstances and they deserve our support.

1.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Wales Office (Viscount Younger of Leckie) (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, for securing this debate and all noble Lords for their remarks. This is my first debate in my new role, although I have covered the department in the past as a Whip. I am, however, only too aware of the experience of the noble Lord in local government. If there is a verb “to Pendle”, the noble Lord could be described as a “much-Pendled” Peer. I am also aware of the experience and knowledge of the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, in this sector and the length of time that he has spent in his role on the Front Bench.

All types of local authorities play a central role in supporting communities, including the most vulnerable, across the country, and district councils are at the heart of delivering many of the key services that matter to communities. We have heard a lot about that today. We are grateful for the transformative changes they have championed and for their continued commitment to providing the day-to-day services that their residents rely on. The Government make it a priority to visit councils—including, I understand, Pendle this month—in order to see the issues and opportunities at first hand.

I want to be clear that it is not only upper-tier authorities that are a priority for this Government: we want all authorities, regardless of size, to know that their concerns are being heard. However, while we seek to understand and address the daily issues faced by councils, it is right that we step back and ask ourselves some strategic questions. What is the best model to serve local needs, especially for the most vulnerable groups? How do different authorities best work with their communities to meet the needs and priorities of local areas, which will no doubt differ across the country? The noble Lord, Lord Goddard, alluded to this in his remarks. What is the right balance between state intervention and support and the power of local democracy for local decision-making and authorities?

These are big questions and we must raise them. Indeed, it is not only me asking questions about the role of local government; the sector itself, including the Local Government Association, is constantly challenging itself to do better for all the people it serves. As my noble friend Lady Redfern said, there have been tough times. There continue to be challenging issues to address, but authorities are being innovative.

Social care services are essential to protect our most vulnerable. This is a priority for this Government. The Prime Minister has been entirely clear on this matter and I am keen today to dedicate some time to how we are supporting district councils and the universal services which neighbourhoods rely on. I will also be reflecting later on the important issues of empowerment and community—which I feel strongly about and which was a major theme in the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Greaves.

I turn first to the spending round. This Government understand their responsibility to make sure that local authorities are adequately funded. I was pleased—as I am sure were all noble Lords—with the positive outcome of the spending round. Core spending power, the measurement we use for local government funding, is expected to grow by £2.9 billion for England, which is an estimated 4.3% real-terms rise. I know that the Secretary of State was delighted to have secured the largest year-on-year increase in spending power since 2010—a package which will allow councils to,

“provide more support for areas such as adult and children’s social care and make sure that we are supporting the most vulnerable people in our local communities”.

Beyond social care, we are protecting vital front-line services by increasing the biggest elements of core settlement funding in line with inflation, and we are consulting on a 2% core council tax principle for all councils next year. I take account of the remarks made by the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, on that issue.

This significant result is a testament to what happens when we work together with the sector. I am grateful to councils up and down the country which fed into our preparations. The LGA has said that we provided local authorities with,

“much of the funding certainty and stability they need for next year”.

I shall address the point raised by the noble Lords, Lord Greaves and Lord Kennedy, on the new homes bonus. The Government have previously noted that 2019-20 was the final year of new homes bonus funding as agreed in the spending review 2015, and that any funding beyond 2019-20 would need to be agreed as part of the next spending review. I understand that the new homes bonus represents an important part of district council budgets and can form a large percentage of core spending power. We have listened to requests from local authorities to honour previously announced legacy payments totalling £624 million. As part of the roll-forward settlement, the Government are minded to make a new round of allocations for 2020-21, and I would welcome views on our proposals.

The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, raised a point on the Public Works Loan Board. I am not particularly familiar with it, but I hope I can reassure him that the Treasury recently increased the margin that applies to new loans from the PWLB by 100 basis points on top of the usual lending terms. The Government also successfully legislated to increase the lending limit of the PWLB from £85 billion to £95 billion to reflect their commitment to ensuring that local authorities can continue to access the financing that they need to support their capital plans. Since this change took effect, my department has been engaging with the sector to understand the potential impact that it could have on its capital plans and strategies, especially with regard to housing and regeneration.

**Lord Adonis:** The Minister has not addressed my point about the substantial increase in the interest rate. I am not expecting him to be able to do so across the House, but will he write to me about it? Would he be prepared to meet me and other noble Lords to discuss this issue, which I understand is central to the ability of local authorities to borrow to build new housing?

**Viscount Younger of Leckie:** I was coming on to address some of the other points on the subject of housing. I will come to the noble Lord's point in a moment. He raised a number of questions and I want to be sure that he receives full answers.

The Government remain committed to business rates retention, which is yielding strong results, including for district councils. We are aiming to increase the level of retention from 50% to 75% from 2021 to give councils greater flexibility over their funding and to reward authorities for generating economic growth.

I now move on to the important issue of relative needs and resources. The noble Lord, Lord Goddard, warned against an easy formula of salami-slicing as opposed to better targeting. That is a very good point. The Government understand that demographic pressures have affected local areas in different ways, as has the cost of providing particular services. Councils told us that they wanted a simpler, up-to-date funding formula

based on the best available evidence, and that is exactly what we are working to deliver. We are working closely with local government representatives to consider the drivers of local authorities' costs, the resources available to them to fund services and how to account for them in a way that draws a more transparent and understandable link between local circumstances and local authority funding. This is a thorough, evidence-based review of the costs faced by all authorities. We have confirmed that we now aim to implement the review in 2021-22 so that the sector has the certainty that it needs to plan for 2020-21. It is important that we get direct feedback from local authorities, and we are grateful for the trusted links that we have across the sector. The more that we can consult, the more likely it is that we can get it right.

In looking ahead to the upcoming local government finance settlement, we have set out our proposals in a technical consultation which will close on 31 October. It sets out the package for local government in more detail and responds to the calls from the sector for certainty and stability. We will listen closely to the views and contributions from representatives of local government and aim to publish a response in the provisional local government finance settlement in early December.

I shall now address a number of questions that were raised. The noble Lord, Lord Greaves, mentioned the critical services on which all communities rely. He mentioned street cleaning, recycling, community services, libraries, housing and many others. I, too, recognise the critical role that all local authorities play in delivering these services. The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, is right that parish councils play an important part in local services. I reassure her that we want them to grow and expand and that we are doing our best in our communities brief to do that. Councils have managed reductions in funding and people's satisfaction with waste collection and libraries has largely held up. Satisfaction levels are high—but that does not mean that we are complacent.

The noble Lord, Lord Greaves, spoke about provision of park and community services. We continue to support parks and community spaces. In fact, I am looking at this area particularly strongly at the moment to see what more can be done. In 2018-19, we invested £15 million in an innovative parks programme, and we will launch a new £1.35 million programme to support the next round of pocket parks very soon. Working with our partner, Pub is the Hub, we have funded almost 200 pub diversification projects, introducing new services that are of value to the community. The noble Lord spoke about waste management and climate change. He was right to raise these important global issues. Like the whole of government, my department supports the objectives of the Environment Bill. Local authorities, as local leaders, experts, place shapers and convenors of local communities, are empowered to play a fundamental role in delivering the environmental action needed in their areas.

My noble friend Lady Redfern, the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, and the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, referred to libraries. I thank them for that. I have spoken on libraries in the past. I recognise the work of staff and volunteers. I know that the Department for

[VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE]

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is working closely with the noble Lord, Lord Bird, to look at the future of libraries in the 21st century. I understand that it is called the libraries task force. Many innovative approaches are being taken across the country, for example in Warrington, to bring services together in communities. My noble friend Lady Redfern and the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, spoke about libraries having to innovate, and they are right.

Councils across the country are transforming not just how they work but their role in leading local places, strengthening local infrastructure and reinventing localities. Many areas are achieving fantastic results, such as district councils in former coalfield areas collaborating on First Art.

The noble Lords, Lord Adonis and Lord Kennedy, spoke about social housing. I shall make a few remarks about housing; there is a lot more I could say, but I am not sure I shall have time. I am delighted to accept the invitation to visit. I think there were probably two visits, one with the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, and one with the noble Lord, Lord Adonis. We have announced a comprehensive package of reform, which will support our ambition to raise housing supply by 300,000 per year by the mid-2020s. We are driving the delivery of affordable housing through measures such as the £9 billion affordable homes programme, abolishing HRA borrowing caps and setting a long-term rent deal for social landlords from 2020. This Government have seen housing supply increase by 1.3 million since 2010. We have also backed schemes such as Help to Buy and Right to Buy, which have supported more than 566,000 households to purchase a home.

The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, raised a number of questions. I shall look at *Hansard* to make sure that his questions receive detailed answers.

I shall pick up on what the noble Earl, Lord Listowel, said about homelessness. It is an issue that we take incredibly seriously in the department under my honourable friend Luke Hall. I thank the noble Earl for his contribution, and I was saddened by the stories he shared with us. He is right that funding is needed alongside community support. That is why, alongside the additional £2.9 billion for local government, this Government are committing over £1.2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, and a flexible homelessness support grant of £670 million. The Chancellor also announced an increase in the level of funding for public health grant so that local authorities can continue to invest in prevention, which, as I am sure the noble Earl agrees, is most important.

I now turn to the communities section of my remarks—an area I regard as very important. The Government are committed to continuing to build strong communities where people feel proud of their neighbourhoods and are actively involved in local decision-making. As my noble friend Lady Redfern said, local government, including the district councils that provide important neighbourhood services, is a vital partner in supporting communities across the country. We also want communities themselves to take an active role in changing their area for the better, because there is much power and potential in our communities. Across the country

we see examples of local people coming together and leading change, from community clean-ups and community groups running valued front-line services, to volunteers in libraries, mentioned by my noble friend Lady Redfern. The Government want to continue to unlock that potential and help create an environment where all our communities feel empowered.

That mission is at the heart of the Government's approach to communities, and, in case there was any doubt, I can say that I am involving myself with great enthusiasm in this area. As the noble Lords, Lord Goddard and Lord Kennedy, said, it is a question of collaboration and integral working to achieve more. As we have discovered, when organisations work together, they are better placed to apply for specific new funding.

This summer my department published a new communities framework, setting out a vision of how we can strengthen our communities with four areas of focus. The first is building trust and local pride. High levels of trust and social capital are a crucial building block for a thriving integrated community and for our nation's well-being and economic prosperity. We want people to feel a sense of pride and connectedness in where they live and to build strong local relationships. That is why my department is supporting work to overcome barriers to integration and help bring people together. That work includes the Near Neighbours scheme, which has supported over 1,600 local community projects, bringing together people from different backgrounds to tackle local issues; programmes to help people improve their English skills, which I believe was mentioned this afternoon, so that they can become part of community life—some people who have been in this country for decades have not addressed that, so we have high hopes—and the Integration Area programme, which is working with five local councils to overcome integration challenges and share their learning, with an additional £10 million announced for the second wave of areas in 2020.

Secondly, I want to focus on active citizenship and giving communities control over local decision-making. This Government are focused on pushing power down and enabling decisions that affect local people to be made at the local level. We will continue to support the community rights and powers established under the Localism Act, such as neighbourhood planning, which enables communities to develop a shared vision for their area for the future.

The third area is shared community spaces. In our busy world, it is becoming increasingly challenging to connect with one another, but shared spaces such as our parks, which were referred to this afternoon, community centres, pubs and libraries provide the vital community infrastructure that brings people together. We have provided additional funding for our parks, which I mentioned earlier, with a new £1.35 million programme, working with our partner Pub is the Hub, which I also mentioned earlier.

The fourth area is shared economic prosperity, with no community left behind. We know that some communities have not shared in the wider economic growth experienced in the UK. The Government are

committed to building strong communities that help create a thriving and inclusive economy, and to ensuring that prosperity is shared.

The noble Lord, Lord Greaves, spoke about towns and high streets. He will know about this but we have committed to a £3.6 billion towns fund, and local people will have a say in how that money is spent. He spoke about competition but it is right that there is a competitive approach. Towns are being invited to approach us and to put in, in effect, business plans setting out how they can reinvigorate their high streets. We want to work closely with them to make sure that funding is directed to the right place. I hope he will forgive me when I say that, in this area, I think competition is a good thing.

Through our support for those four areas of work—trust and local pride, active citizenship, community spaces and shared prosperity—the Government will continue to work to empower communities.

I recently visited Walsall, which is one of our integration areas, and met several community groups and organisations doing amazing work to support local people. I met groups running English classes to enable people to increase their confidence, make the most of the opportunities available, and play a full and active role in the local community. I also heard about the Places of Welcome scheme, which tackles loneliness and social isolation by providing places where people can go simply to see a friendly face or have a cup of tea and connect with others. This is an example of what can be achieved when local government works in partnership with local actors to build stronger and more integrated communities. It is one thing that I will definitely continue to press ahead with.

In conclusion, I assure noble Lords that this Government are committed to providing local government with the funding it needs and to ensuring that the funding is both flexible and proportionate to an area's demographic needs. The noble Earl, Lord Listowel, spoke about homelessness and I want to write to him on that specific point.

1.35 pm

**Lord Greaves:** My Lords, I thank everybody who has contributed to this debate. At the beginning I was a bit worried that not enough people were taking part, but I think we have proved that, if the people taking part have a good enough argument and narrative and know what they are talking about, allowing them time to develop what they say can be better than them having to rush through a two or three-minute speech.

I think I have a couple of minutes in which to speak—I cannot see anyone objecting to that—so I would like to respond to the noble Baroness, Lady Redfern, and my noble friend Lady Pinnock on libraries. If anyone ever finds themselves near the town of Colne, they should give me a ring and I will take them to Trawden in the Lancashire Pennines. It used to be a weaving village but is now very much a middle-class professional village. The Trawden community centre, which used to be run by the council, has taken over an old nursery and turned it into the only village shop, which is thriving as a community shop, and it works in partnership with the county council to run the local

library. That is a superb example of how that kind of thing can be really successful. I should declare an interest as a non-active member of the community interest company that runs it. Therefore, it can be done and the service provided is far better than it ever was under the council. However, that will not happen everywhere. In poorer and working-class areas, it can be, and often is, done, but it requires a greater input of resources and harder work if the people taking part do not already have the skills that retired professional people have, so it is not the answer to everything.

I say to my noble friend Lord Goddard that what Stockport Council has done with the ground at Stockport County FC is brilliant. In Colne, where I live, Pendle Council owns the land of Colne FC, another up-and-coming non-league club. Colne FC has a free 99-year lease on the ground. That is the sort of thing that can be done. I know of other non-league clubs that have been put out of business by their councils demanding unpaid rent and the clubs having to go into liquidation. You can see the difference when a council regards its community as important, even if something like a local football club is owned not by the council but perhaps privately.

I shall not go through everything the Minister said—apart from anything, he would not allow that—but I will read what he said very carefully. I am very grateful for his comments and no doubt we will have many discussions about them in the future.

I have one final thing to say about neighbourhood services. I stress that I am talking about neighbourhood services, not local government as a whole. We have squeezed the pips until they squeal. We have cut to the bone. We have built partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors and got private sector money in. We have transferred services to town and parish councils, which often run them in a more community-oriented manner and much more cheaply. We have harnessed the volunteers who are there and will continue to do so. As I said in my original speech, however, we are reaching the end of this process in many places. Neighbourhood services will start to collapse seriously unless more resources are put into them. For as long as I am an active Member of your Lordships' House, I shall continue to harass the Government over this matter.

*Motion agreed.*

## Syria and Iraq

### *Question for Short Debate*

1.40 pm

*Asked by Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the situation in Syria and Iraq following Turkey's invasion of Syria.

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome this opportunity to discuss the recent events in north-east Syria, and their implications for the wider region, and to ask a number of questions of the Minister. I start by saying how grateful I am that he is in his place today. This issue is of such importance that I believe it is important that we see him respond to the questions that will be posed. I also thank those

[LORD MCCONNELL OF GLENSCORRODALE]

noble Lords who have stepped forward to speak today. We have an excellent range of contributions ahead; I look forward to hearing the many points that will, I am sure, be made in our short debate.

I am realistic about the role of the United Kingdom in the region, and in the current power politics and power diplomacy at play in Syria and its neighbourhood. However, the current situation is so unacceptable and so strategically disastrous that it is right that we have a voice and take a view. As a country, we must act where we can to influence affairs. The emergence of a new vision for a global Britain may well be about the promotion of British trade and the sale of British goods around the world, but it must also be about our security and our values. That is why these important events demand our attention.

My first point is that while the actions of the current Administration in the United States of America might be unpredictable at times, what has happened in these past two weeks was entirely predictable. Turkey threatened regularly to take the action that it has, while the USA has, from time to time over the last few months, indicated that it might allow it to do so. My first question is about those few months. What representations did the UK Government make, inside NATO or bilaterally, to either Turkey or the United States, to try to deter what we have seen emerging over recent days?

The outcome, of course, was also predictable. We have seen our allies, the Kurds, abandoned. We have seen over 160,000 people, including around 80,000 children, displaced from their homes and now at serious risk. We have seen religious minorities, already persecuted by some of the armed gangs operating in the area—at times in close co-ordination with the Turkish army—now displaced from their ancestral homelands. We have seen captured fighters from Islamic State, or Daesh, potentially let loose. We have seen British children in some of these camps at serious risk and not yet able, or assisted, to return home. We have seen the possible use—or allegations, at least—of chemical weapons by the Turkish army. At the end of the day, those who have in recent times stood against democracy and human rights and for other forms of action—Syria, Russia and, indeed, Turkey—have been strengthened in their positions, regionally and globally. This is a desperate state of affairs and it poses a number of questions for the Government.

The first question relates to security. It was estimated by the United States Government in a public announcement yesterday that at least 100 IS, or Daesh, fighters have already been released from the camps. This figure was minimised by the spokesperson for the United States Government who announced it. He is clearly not aware that even one suicide bomber can cause carnage on the streets of Europe or North America, or indeed in the region, in Iraq or elsewhere. Our first priority has to be the continued capture of those IS, or Daesh, fighters, and the protection of those who guard them in the camps. What action are the Government taking as part of the coalition to ensure that this will be the case?

Secondly, we need to commit right now to reviewing our role, not only in a coalition that seems to be struggling to hold together with a proper sense of purpose in the region but in relation to what is acceptable within NATO. I do not advocate action against Turkey's membership of NATO but I do think that, despite the fact it is a NATO member, we need stronger action on arms sales to Turkey, if this is the purpose to which those arms might be put.

In relation to our values, I am horrified by the idea that Turkey could use this military exercise to return hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria—who fled the Syrian regime and the violence, torture and chaos that has gone with the conflict over the last few years—back to within the Syrian border, and potentially, given the agreements of recent days, place them back under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Government, the Syrian army and their Russian allies. It would clearly be contrary to international law and to our expectations of a country that still aspires to join the European Union—even as we leave—and is a member of NATO. What representations have the Government made, and what action shall we take, to ensure that international law on refugees is upheld by the Turkish Government and that they do not forcibly repatriate refugees from their territory back into Syria, where they might be in grave danger?

Although we had many opportunities yesterday, for which I am sure we are all grateful, I want to use this opportunity to again ask the Minister for an update on the position of British children, both orphans and other unaccompanied minors, who are in these camps with those who were either fighting for or living with Islamic State, or Daesh. What opportunities will there be in the coming days to repatriate all these children back to the United Kingdom?

We have a role as a major international humanitarian force in providing humanitarian assistance for those displaced. There are serious concerns about basic services, such as the provision of water, in some of the affected towns. Having visited the internally displaced persons camps in Syria and northern Iraq in the summer, I know the pressure that they were already under. Thousands of people have already crossed the border into Iraq. What action is being taken using UK resources, inside Iraq and inside Syria, to help address the humanitarian needs that will undoubtedly develop?

Finally, what action will we take in the coming days, weeks and months to reinforce the international system? Will we continue to press for the justice required by those immediate victims, particularly the Yazidis and other persecuted religious minorities? What action will be taken to provide justice for them and to try members of Islamic State/Daesh for their rapes, beatings and murders in attempting to carry out genocide against the Yazidis and others? However difficult it might be, we cannot ignore the alleged use of chemical weapons, not just by the Syrian regime but now by the Turkish Government as well. What action will we take to try to ensure that anybody who is alleged to have used chemical weapons is successfully investigated and, if necessary, prosecuted?

1.50 pm

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** My Lords, this is a very topical issue and I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, on promoting this debate. Just when some people believed that things could not get any worse in the Syrian theatre, it now seems that the real danger is that they are indeed getting worse.

From the start, the United Kingdom's policy has been a classic example of tramline thinking and assuming that the future will be like the past. First, right at the start, there was the Arab spring, which everyone thought would be like the Prague spring. The very word "spring" was misleading; people thought that dictators would fall and democracy would blossom. None of that has happened. Secondly, Syria was assumed to be the same as other Arab countries with tyrants overthrown, when of course it is really quite different. Thirdly, there was inadequate taking into account of the realities of the digital age, when foreign and international policy issues are working out quite differently from in the past. That applies to the whole range of foreign policy, as a matter of fact.

Right from the start, we were warned by ex-ambassadors of great distinction in this House—at least two of them, if not more—that we were on the wrong track. I have nothing but huge admiration for the Minister who will answer, and this is nothing to do with him at all, but the truth is that our policy has been an unmitigated disaster. We have now got to the point where NATO is being threatened in a very dangerous way. There are huge threats to the supply lines and security of the NATO structure. America has shown itself to be an utterly unreliable and erratic ally, changing its policy from day to day. Russia is in the driving seat. I suppose all one can say on that is, "Good luck", because it too will be sucked into the quagmire in due course. I expect that, in the end, it will find the same experience as it has in Afghanistan. However, for the moment, it is riding high and in cahoots with Turkey, so far as one can make out.

What is the way forward out of all this? I think there are just two things we can do. First, we can at least understand Turkey's fear of PKK terrorism. No one likes terrorism, or bombs going off in their territory; we have to understand that. That does not mean for a second that we can condone what Turkey is doing in trying to grab the top part of Syria. It does not mean that we condone for a second the summary executions and the violence that has been shown in the last few weeks. Maybe it will stop for a few days, but there is no guarantee that it will not resume immediately.

Secondly, I believe the British should continue to support the Kurds in every way we can, although it is bound to be limited. They are old friends and allies and we have given them certain undertakings in the past which I believe we should now try to stick to, limited though our abilities and capacities are in this whole muddled scene. Let us at least rescue some principle out of this whole imbroglio. That is my plea to the Minister and I would dearly like to know whether we will indeed give the support we can to the Kurds, even while they are being attacked from all sides, by Assad, Russia and Turkey. They are our friends. We should stick by our friends.

1.54 pm

**Lord Alderdice (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale. He is absolutely consistent in addressing violent conflict and promoting development internationally. This debate is another example of his consistent commitment. There are some things about which we should be consistent and others that we should change. I want to speak about some of the things that ought to be changed that are not being changed, and those things that we ought to be consistent about.

The noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, talked about the disastrous policy that we have adopted in Syria. I come back, as I have done repeatedly since the start of this whole sorry episode, to my warning that the British Government's adoption of a policy of getting rid of Assad as a primary requirement was a disaster. It was always going to be a disaster. I was not the only one who issued warnings in your Lordships' House. Others who knew the region said the same thing and the Government refused to listen. It is time for the Government to understand how disastrous that has been and to change that policy.

The second thing that the western world has done consistently and that we need to change is betraying the Kurds. In 1920, under the treaty of Sèvres, there ought to have been a Kurdish state, but in the subsequent treaty of Lausanne, they were abandoned. They have been abandoned time after time after time and have now been abandoned again by the United States, which benefited so enormously from their courage and commitment in dealing with Daesh. That betrayal of the Kurds is something that has not changed, but must be changed, not just for good moral reasons but for political and strategic reasons too.

There are some things that are changing, but it were better they did not. When Mr Erdoğan became Prime Minister of Turkey, before he became President, I visited on quite a number of occasions and met his Ministers, police, security forces and so on. He was interested in applying the Northern Ireland experience to the Kurdish problem and started down that road. There were talks for a period of time and then, in a characteristically emotional outburst, he threw his head up, abandoned the whole business and turned everything on its head. That is a change that we need to stop.

The other change also emerges from Turkey. Turkey has been our ally, but it is not behaving like an ally now. It is not behaving like an ally in its relationships with Russia and its obtaining of weapons. It would have been inconceivable some years ago for a NATO ally to obtain weapons in that way. It is a signal that things are going the wrong way in Turkey's relationship with us. However, there may be worse to come because, in the last few weeks, there have been indications from Turkey that it may wish to obtain nuclear arms. What are the Government doing to inquire after this question and to address it? We know the Saudis have been talking in similar terms and that they have relationships with Pakistan. Turkey talking in such a way, along with the breakdown of the treaty with Iran and the situation in Israel, creates a situation that is potentially globally catastrophic. I hope that the Minister can indicate that HMG are taking it seriously.

1.58 pm

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, for initiating today's debate and giving us the chance to return to questions that a number of noble Lords raised during the debate on the gracious Speech. I raised these questions on 16 October—at col. 116—and earlier today, in the Oral Question answered by the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie. I will ask the Minister a specific question at the outset which I put to the noble Baroness earlier today. It concerns the camp at al-Hawl, which is just a few miles from the so-called safe zone. It is a desolate place where some 68,000 ISIS family members are held and where the ISIS flag has been flying again in recent weeks. What are we doing to ensure that those inside those camps are kept there and that they are brought to justice in due course? It would be utterly inconceivable to talk about a war on terror and the pursuit of justice if we allowed them simply to walk away.

The Minister will recall that I sent him and raised in earlier interventions a list of known jihadists fighting alongside the Turkish army in this conflict. What is being done to evaluate the credibility of those names and how are we holding Turkey to account?

Other noble Lords have referred to Turkey's NATO membership. I took the trouble to look at what a new applicant to NATO would have to do to satisfy membership. Turkey today is very different from the Turkey that joined NATO in 1952. Candidates need,

“to have stable democratic systems, pursue the peaceful settlement of territorial and ethnic disputes, have good relations with their neighbours, show commitment to the rule of law and human rights”.

I hope the Minister will say, on the basis of Turkey's actions in northern Syria, which of those criteria still apply to it.

I hope the Minister will also address some points that I have put to him through Written Questions and in correspondence. What assessment has he made of reports that 13 year-old Mohammed Hamid Mohammed, admitted to Tal Tamir hospital following the bombing of Ras al-Ain by Turkey, is a victim of white phosphorus? Do the Government intend therefore to refer this issue to the International Criminal Court to seek justice for the reported violations of the Geneva conventions and the Chemical Weapons Convention?

What assessment have the Government made of whether the execution of Hevrin Khalaf, the secretary-general of the Future Syria Party, constitutes a war crime, along with the claim by the Syrian Democratic Forces that nine executions of civilians have been carried out since the invasion of Syria by Turkey?

What information have the Government received about the plight of religious or political minorities, referred to by the noble Lord in his introductory remarks, who are at risk from genocidaires in north-east Syria? What action are they taking in accordance with the requirements of the convention on the prevention of genocide to protect them and to bring the perpetrators to justice? What progress are they making in establishing international judicial mechanisms to bring those responsible for genocide to justice? What steps are

they taking to assist other national partners in planning an exit strategy for Christians, Yazidis and other minorities who now might face genocide?

Those are legitimate questions that have been put to the Minister in writing. I hope he will take this opportunity to actually answer them.

2.02 pm

**Lord Hylton (CB):** My Lords, we should remember that the Turkish attack of 9 October was unprovoked and not authorised by the United Nations or NATO. It included undisciplined militias, whose previous record in Afrin was appalling. White phosphorus inflicted serious burns in at least 15 to 20 cases. This must be investigated. Kobane, which heroically resisted ISIS, was attacked by Turkey. Water supplies and hospitals were damaged. The ceasefire therefore came as a merciful relief, but it has been broken by both sides. It needs independent verification and should be made permanent. Will UN observers be available for this?

There should be clear principles for the future. Displaced local people must be enabled to return. Property rights should be respected. No refugees from other parts of Syria should be settled in the so-called safe zone, even temporarily, without their explicit consent. Secondly, Turkish, Russian and Assad forces should be restricted to the frontier area, which is 20 miles deep.

A huge task exists for UN agencies to help restore water supplies, hospitals, schools and IDP camps. Local authorities should be fully involved in this. Such reconstruction should have a guaranteed budget.

Will Her Majesty's Government call on Turkey to compensate Syrian civilians for those killed and seriously wounded? Will compensation also be available to local authorities for damage to civil infrastructure? Will Her Majesty's Government work, as a permanent member, for a UN Security Council resolution providing for ceasefire observations and full access for UN agencies to all of Rojava east of the Euphrates?

For too long, Syria has been a free-fire zone for outside states and factions with almost unlimited resources. It is high time that international law was reasserted. This must be in the interests of the Syrian people. Agencies such as NATO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe might have useful roles in this. British and European military exports should be resumed only if the ceasefire is maintained and Turkish forces withdraw from Syria. The same should apply to any sanctions.

I stress the value of the US/Turkey statement of 17 October:

“The two countries ... pledge to uphold human life, human rights, and the protection of religious and ethnic communities”. Perhaps we should all use our moral senses to imagine and then to work hard to improve what now exists.

2.06 pm

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB):** My Lords, what is happening in north-east Syria is a tragedy for many thousands of individuals, most of them ethnic Kurds who were our allies quite recently in fighting IS. That is not in doubt. Were it to lead to IS terrorists escaping from confinement, it would adversely affect our own security—that is also not in doubt. That the power relationships in the region and even more widely have

been thrown out by two of our allies, the US and Turkey, to our and their long-term detriment, can hardly be gainsaid. Noble Lords might think that that is quite a score for an ill-considered telephone conversation between President Trump and President Erdoğan and the series of intemperate and ignorant tweets that followed it.

Our own role in all this has hardly been glorious. We have not been consulted by our closest ally, even though some of our own Armed Forces were involved. Our attempts to stop the Turkish military operation have been brushed aside. We are still dithering about taking back orphans and young children who are British and whose lives are now at risk.

Here are one or two questions that I hope the Minister can answer. First, is it the Government's view that, if the Turks were to force Syrian refugees to return to Syrian territory that their troops have now occupied, that would be contrary to the refugee convention and to their obligations under international law? Secondly, is it the Government's view that, if Turkey were to remove the Kurds from that territory to make way for Syrian Arab refugees, that would amount to ethnic cleansing and thus potentially be a war crime?

Thirdly, however sympathetic one might be to Turkey's suffering over recent years from terrorism—I am myself so—how on earth can pushing the effective border some 30 kilometres to the south solve that problem? Might it not very well make it worse? Fourthly, and most important to us, how can the damage to the confidence of those who depend for their security on their alliance with the United States be restored?

This whole sorry story has started as badly as it could have done. What do the Government intend to do to ensure that it does not end in an even worse place? President Trump would have us believe that it is all a strategic triumph. Is that the Government's view?

2.09 pm

**Baroness Stroud (Con):** My Lords, it goes without saying that we are at a critical juncture. While the focus of international attention—and outrage—has rightly been on the nature of the US withdrawal from north-eastern Syria, our attention should also be on those at risk from the latest outbreak of violence. An estimated 300,000 people have now fled violence in northern Syria—almost double the figure stated by the Foreign Secretary in his response to an Urgent Question last week in the other place. Reports continue to surface of widespread casualties, including from the alleged use of white phosphorus munitions in Turkey's aerial and artillery bombardment of Kurdish forces, with innocent civilians, including children, among the victims.

Turkey's incursion has upended the fragile security of the region and poses grave questions about the fate of an estimated 100,000 ISIS militants in detention within areas under Kurdish control. The agreement struck between President Putin and President Erdoğan is intended to create a 30 kilometre-deep exclusion zone along the Turkey/Syria border, not only to tackle the perceived threat from Kurdish militants but to repatriate some or all of Turkey's sizeable population of some 3.5 million Syrian refugees. I want to focus my remarks specifically on the issue of these refugees.

For more than three years, Turkey has generously hosted the world's largest population of refugees, with close to 4 million refugees and asylum seekers residing within its borders, including more than 3.5 million Syrians. This equates to around 20% of the total Syrian population and almost two-thirds of all Syrian refugees worldwide. With the civil war in Syria entering its eighth year, the prospects for their repatriation from Turkey appear limited; and public opinion at the ballot box inside Turkey has begun to turn against the refugees.

We in the West must also acknowledge our own responsibility. Three years on, the EU has yet to meet its own pledge, as part of the deal struck with Turkey in 2016, to pay Ankara the second instalment of funding to help Turkey meet the costs of hosting such large numbers of Syrian refugees. But even against this backdrop, we must recognise that it is an extreme response to growing consternation within Turkey over the long-term viability of such a large refugee population. Also, President Erdoğan's apparent intention forcibly to repatriate large numbers of Syrian refugees within the exclusion zone threatens to undermine the good will he and his Government have fostered through their role in supporting vulnerable refugees.

As we have heard this afternoon, the current situation requires our urgent attention. Already, it is becoming clear that, like any conflict, the incursion will create winners and losers. The losers will be those Syrians, including Kurds, from whom so much has already been taken. The winners will be Russia, Assad and ISIS. That cannot be in our national interest. Turkey has been an important ally in a volatile region, but we must make it plain that Turkey's actions risk further destabilisation and will potentially place millions of Syrian refugees in intolerable danger. We must encourage Turkey to show restraint. I ask my noble friend the Minister to outline what plans he has to encourage Turkey to do so and to think again about the forced repatriation of Syrian refugees.

The fate of millions quite literally hangs in the balance.

2.13 pm

**Baroness Northover (LD):** My Lords, I have looked at the Order Paper and, perhaps like Ronnie Corbett, I know my place and it is before the Official Opposition.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for putting down this urgent topic for debate. This very short debate has been both overarching and detailed. Noble Lords have made plain their concerns about what is following from President Trump's extraordinary decision to give the green light to Turkey to invade northern Syria. The Americans are rightly seen as having betrayed their Kurdish allies. Following my noble friend Lord Alderdice, may I ask what exactly is our policy towards Syria now and what do we make of the pressure on NATO? What consultation is going on with the Americans in the aftermath of their decision? What joint approach are we taking with other EU countries? Is the Foreign Secretary not even attending the relevant EU meetings, and why, I ask again, did the Foreign Secretary not raise Turkey's action in his speech at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly? Does the Minister agree that this move has given Russia extraordinary extra influence in the region, although I note what the noble Lord, Lord Howell, has just said?

[BARONESS NORTHOVER]

Nearly all US forces have now left Syria but they have not gone home—they are mostly redeployed in western Iraq. The US and Turkey have reached a deal on a ceasefire which lasts until only next Tuesday. Neither the Syrian regime nor the SDF were parties to the agreement. Turkey has said that military operations will resume if the SDF has not withdrawn. May I therefore ask what plans there are for deconfliction between the Turkish armed forces, the Syrian regime forces and the SDF in this circumstance?

We now hear reports of even more possible war crimes, in a region with an appalling toll already. So what assessment have the Government made of the reports of Turkish use of white phosphorous against civilians, as mentioned by my noble friend Lord Alton and the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, and the use of political assassination by Turkish or Turkish-backed forces in north-east Syria? Have the Government looked at the likelihood that the Syrian regime will round up thousands of political opponents following its renewed control over north-east Syria?

President Erdoğan has declared his intention to settle 1 million to 2 million Syrian refugees in the occupied zone, as other noble Lords have mentioned. Does the Minister agree that as the occupying power, Turkey does not have the right to confiscate land to re-house refugees, and neither should people be forced into an area from which they have not come, as the noble Lords, Lord Hylton and Lord Hannay, have just mentioned?

There are seven camps in Syria where Daesh fighters and their families are being held, and we know that the SDF warns that it can no longer guarantee security. We discussed in Questions yesterday the position of British citizens, particularly children; I look forward to the Minister's response.

America's actions have just made an incredibly unstable region even more dangerous. If this does not illustrate why we need to work together internationally and not retreat into "America first" or "England first", it is difficult to think of what would.

I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.17 pm

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, I too would like to thank my noble friend for giving us the opportunity to return to this highly topical and important issue this week. What we have seen in the last 48 hours is what many saw coming after the unilateral US withdrawal: a stitch-up over territory between Turkey, Russia and the Assad regime, with the Kurds, as ever, caught in the middle. As the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, reminded us, throughout history the Kurdish people have been betrayed in brutal conflicts and have repeatedly been ignored when suffering at the hands of others.

As our allies, what role does the Minister believe there is for the Kurdistan Regional Government in future peace negotiations? Sochi may mean an end to the fighting and displacement of people that we have seen over the past fortnight, but it will not solve the humanitarian crisis facing that region. We need to work urgently through NGOs operating on the ground to get support to those who need it. Thousands of Kurds are fleeing with frantic urgency. The Bardarash

refugee camp, in Iraq, alone has reported that more than 7,000 Kurds have arrived, with many thousands more attempting to reach similar locations. Can the Minister detail what support and advice the Government are offering to the Iraqi authorities to assist with this crisis?

Throughout the conflict in Syria, NGOs have operated on the ground to provide crucial humanitarian support to save lives and alleviate suffering. Can the Minister explain what support is being offered to these organisations to promote the safe delivery of aid? Many of us have heard on the "Today" programme the first-hand account of a British citizen giving support. What advice is being given to UK citizens who are part of these organisations and remain in the region? What steps has the UK taken to seek international agreement for humanitarian corridors, to allow for the safe evacuation of civilians?

The Government's review of arms sales to Turkey is welcome, but it will not put an end to UK arms being used in the conflict. Last week, the Minister assured this House that the UK had a robust regime for our arms and defence exports and would continue to look at the situation very carefully. He told the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, that he would examine the French and German policy and consider whether we could have concerted action. Are we taking similar action? Have we considered halting existing licences, as Amnesty International now suggests? As many noble Lords have said, Kurdish forces have been safeguarding security, ensuring that thousands of militants are not able to roam freely and cause havoc in the region. This instability may mean that many will escape. What assessment have the Government made of this risk to the future security of the region, and what is the Government's strategy to deal with it?

2.21 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for this timely opportunity to debate what is a very fluid but very worrying situation in northern Syria. I am also grateful for the exchanges that we have had outside of your Lordships' Chamber on this matter. He has long shown a keen interest in the plight of displaced people in Iraq and Syria, and I pay tribute to his efforts in that regard. I share his vision of the relationship that we have, and the role that the United Kingdom plays is not diminished but remains an active one, as it should be. It covers issues beyond just humanitarian support; it includes issues of security. He and other noble Lords have heard me time and again, I am sure, agreeing about the importance of stressing our credentials as an advocate of human rights, wherever we are operating in the world and wherever we see human rights abuses.

Let me say at the outset that the Government have been clear that we oppose Turkey's military action in Syria. My noble friend Lord Howell, the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, and several other noble Lords, made the point that Turkey does have some legitimate concerns relating to the 3.6 million Syrian refugees. We pay tribute to the fact that it is hosting these refugees, and Her Majesty's Government have helped to support the refugees. We also recognise the threat posed by the

PKK to security on Turkey's southern border. However, I share the views of the noble Lords, Lord McConnell and Lord Hannay, and of my noble friend Lord Howell that a Turkish military operation would, as we all feared, seriously undermine the already fragile stability and security of the region. There is a worsening humanitarian crisis, and the incursion has increased the suffering of millions of people. We feared that it would distract the international community from defeating Daesh—the noble Lord, Lord Alton, raised that issue—which should be our primary focus, and it has. We also feared that it would play into the hands of Russia and the Assad regime, and the frank assessment is that it has done so. That is why we repeatedly appealed to Turkey not to take this step.

The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, when we were debating this previously, and in his discussions with me, commented that we have acted within the context of the UN Security Council. Other members of the Security Council shared this view. When we met on 10 and 16 October, they warned of the severe risk of Daesh fighters dispersing and expressed concern over the possible further deterioration in the humanitarian situation. It is therefore deeply regrettable that Turkey went ahead with its operation, not heeding the appeals of its friends and NATO allies. Sadly, those fears are being realised, as we have seen. While it is a fluid situation, at least 160,000 people have been displaced and dozens killed, and, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton, reminded us, a number of Daesh detainees appear to have escaped from prisons they were being held in by Kurdish fighters.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, also raised the deeply concerning issue of credible reports of the execution of civilians by Syrian armed groups supporting the Turkish operation, including the killing of the politician Hevrin Khalaf on 12 October. I put on record that we utterly condemn these incidents and have made clear the need to investigate them fully. We also condemn incidents of shelling by the YPG into Turkey, which has also been concern which I am sure noble Lords share, which has resulted in civilian casualties on the Turkish side. We call on all sides to respect their obligations towards civilians under international humanitarian law.

We welcome the ceasefire brokered by the United States, and in the area of the Turkish operation so far it has held. It is also important that this cessation of hostilities continues.

We also note the agreement reached between Turkey and Russia on 22 October. This agreement clearly has significant implications, and we are seeking further information—the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, among others, raised this issue—on its potential impact on the civilian population.

Several noble Lords asked about specific UK action, and I just want to lay out some of the steps that we have taken so far. The noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, rightly raised concerns about the relationship that we have with Turkey. Turkey is a partner. We have security interests, on aviation security and humanitarian support, and, as the noble Lord reminded us, Turkey is a NATO ally. In this regard, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary expressed our grave concerns to the Turkish Foreign Minister on 10 October. My right

honourable friend the Prime Minister spoke to President Erdoğan two days later, urging restraint and offering UK support in negotiations towards a ceasefire.

The Foreign Secretary has also addressed the issue. The noble Baroness, Lady Northover, mentioned the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on 12 October, and it is my understanding that that was certainly part of the discussions—I know that she has raised this issue before. Regarding another question that she raised, on 14 October we supported our EU partners in the EU's statement condemning Turkey's unilateral military action, calling on Turkey to withdraw its forces. We also joined with fellow European members of the UN Security Council to request a discussion of the situation at the Security Council on 10 and 16 October. As I have said before, I have been directly involved in the discussions with our European partners, not just on this issue but on how we continue to strengthen co-operation with all European members of the Security Council.

The noble Lords, Lord McConnell, Lord Hylton and Lord Collins, mentioned arms export licences. On 15 October, the Foreign Secretary announced that no further arms export licences would be granted for items that might be used in the military operations in Syria until we have completed a thorough review. That position remains.

The Prime Minister spoke to President Erdoğan again on 20 October, expressing his hope that the ceasefire agreed with the United States would be made permanent. The Prime Minister invited him to meet, alongside President Macron and Chancellor Merkel, to discuss the current situation and broader issues, including counterterrorism and migration. That was something that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister directly offered to the Turkish president.

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, rightly raised the issue of humanitarian aid, and I know that is a concern of many noble Lords. My noble friend Lord Howell talked of the UK's role. While I respect his position, I am sure that he would acknowledge that when it comes to humanitarian support, the UK has really been at the forefront in providing assistance to many of the suffering people of the region. That also was the case in northern Syria before the Turkish actions. The UK has already committed £40 million to the region in this financial year to help address some of the most acute needs, including those issues noble Lords raised: water, food, shelter and healthcare. We are hopeful that this money can be spent as planned.

However, I recognise that the situation on the ground is volatile, fast moving and dangerous, and therefore contingency plans must be made and we must understand the lie of the land to ensure that the safety and security of those providing assistance can also be guaranteed. The Department for International Development is in daily contact with local partners, including the UN and local agencies—the noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked a question on this—to deliver assistance on the ground and to ensure the safety and security of those delivering aid.

The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, my noble friend Lady Stroud and the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, talked of the return of Turkey's refugees. While we

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON] recognise Turkey's generosity, I make it clear that any return of refugees to Syria must be voluntary and in line with international law. We have made that point in our exchanges with Turkey. I make it explicit for the record that we do not and would not support forced returns to areas that have not yet been declared safe by the UN. Furthermore, we have no intention to support Turkey's plans for reconstruction in the secure zone, nor do we recognise any demographic change brought about as a result of this incursion.

My right honourable friend the Development Secretary will work with the UN emergency relief co-ordinator, Mark Lowcock, and spoke to him on 14 October about ongoing plans on the ground. I am sure that all noble Lords agree that it is essential that humanitarian agencies are able to operate safely. We call on all parties to ensure that principle is upheld.

Several noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, raised the issue of British orphans. We are making provision to ensure the safe return of unaccompanied minors and orphans, and we will continue to examine the circumstances of all other identified British citizens on a case-by-case basis.

**Lord Howell of Guildford:** I am sorry to interrupt the Minister when he has only minutes left, but can he give us some hint of what British Kurdish training units and British troops are left on the ground in this turmoil in the northern Syrian region?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My noble friend will appreciate that I cannot go into the details of the specific British presence there, but we are working on the ground to ensure that we lend support to our allies. We are very cognisant of the situation of the Kurds.

My noble friend spoke about support in Iraq. I assure him and others that we are extending our support to the Kurdish regional Government and the Kurdish community in Iraq, particularly as displaced people cross the border. We continue to work closely with the Government of Iraq.

**Baroness Stroud:** My Lords—

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, I am very conscious of time.

Specific questions were asked by the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, among others, about white phosphorus. I am fully aware of the worrying allegations that white phosphorus was used against civilians. We are working to establish the full facts.

Co-operation with NATO was raised. While noble Lords will recognise that NATO does not investigate breaches of international humanitarian law, NATO Defence Ministers, including the Defence Secretary, will discuss north-east Syria in their meeting on 24 to 25 October.

A number of other questions were raised by the noble Lord, Lord Hylton. If I may, I shall write to him on those issues and on any other questions that I have been unable to cover.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, said, this is an extensive subject which perhaps requires more than just the time allowed in a Question for Short Debate. I

am sure that it is not just me who recognises that; I am sure that we will return to this issue in the coming days and weeks.

Let me assure noble Lords that the UK remains committed to continuing to play our part as a strong ally to the communities across the region. We remain committed to assisting unaccompanied minors and those identified as British citizens to ensure that we can represent them and examine each case.

We have a strong relationship with Turkey, and this should not be underestimated. We supported its application to join the EU. I think that is recognised. I have seen the detail of the discussions that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has had with the President. The nature of that relationship allows us to play a role with Turkey. I am sure that all noble Lords recognise the importance of the invitation that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has made to the President of Turkey, while also recognising that our key partners, especially France and Germany, should also be involved in that meeting.

The UK has opposed Turkey's recent offensive in north-east Syria. As several noble Lords said, it is not an action that we would expect from a staunch NATO ally. It has caused unnecessary further bloodshed and suffering in a region that has already suffered too much, and it has diverted international attention from ensuring the lasting defeat of Daesh.

The UK has been active in pressing Turkey to end its operation. We will continue to make clear to Turkey the depth of feeling in your Lordships' House and elsewhere about its continued actions. We remain committed to advocating the interests of the local population, including respecting the rights of the Kurds in both Syria and Iraq. We remain committed to the global coalition against Daesh, in which the Kurdish communities and representatives play an important part, and to the long-term stability of Syria, Iraq and the wider region. We will continue in our humanitarian efforts in this respect.

I thank again all noble Lords for their contributions to this vital debate, and I look forward to further discussions on this important matter.

## Hong Kong

### *Motion to Take Note*

2.35 pm

*Moved by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

That this House takes note of the recent political unrest in Hong Kong, and of the calls to offer residents of Hong Kong citizenship in another country.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, the purpose of today's debate is to gain a better understanding of why up to 2 million people have felt compelled to participate in mass popular protests in Hong Kong; of how regressive changes in China have created a storm of anxiety; of why the UK has a moral and legal obligation to stand with its people, and of how the international community, including the Commonwealth, can provide guarantees to Hong Kong that will give its people an insurance policy of security and solidarity.

On more than 20 occasions in the past year, I have highlighted the weakening of the guarantees contained in the 1984 Sino-British joint declaration—which is an international treaty—the disturbing erosion of “two systems, one country” and the changes in China that have caused such apprehension in Hong Kong. The joint declaration, through the Basic Law, enshrines the fundamental principles of the rule of law, democracy, human rights and free speech—not just a treaty but for Hong Kong’s people a way of life, now placed at grave risk.

What began as a rejection of Beijing’s erosion of the territory’s Basic Law and Carrie Lam’s unjust extradition Bill has become a broader fight about Hong Kong’s autonomy and very future. It is hard to disagree with the proposition that Hong Kong is the new front line in a clash of value systems. In the aftermath of the 1997 handover, Beijing upheld “one country, two systems”, but in the past few years, both Hong Kong’s freedoms and trust have been undermined and eroded increasingly dramatically.

The final straw was Beijing’s attempt to compromise the judicial system. The people of Hong Kong are well aware of how the Chinese courts administer justice. In 2018, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, the courts in Jiangsu province acquitted just 43 people while convicting 96,271. They are the ones who are actually given a trial, unlike Lam Wing-kee, a bookseller in Hong Kong for 20 years, who was abducted and incarcerated for eight months, and whom I met in Taiwan last month. He told me that highly placed Communist Party officials bought books from him. Without irony, he said that his bestsellers included George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Chinese authorities told Mr Lam, “If we say you have committed a crime, you have committed a crime”. Denied all contact with his family and left in degrading conditions, he contemplated suicide.

Belief in the rule of law has been further compromised by Carrie Lam’s unenforceable ban on face masks and her decision to invoke emergency powers—always a harbinger of autocracy and the latest in a long list of blunders. Amnesty accuses the Hong Kong police and points to,

“an alarming pattern of ... reckless and indiscriminate tactics”, beatings and torture. Dominic Raab has condemned the use of force as “disproportionate”, with calls for an independent inquiry.

The brutality of China’s agents was underlined last week when Jimmy Sham, a leading voice for democracy, was viciously attacked by five hammer-wielding assailants. You will never create a harmonious and law-abiding society by using agents provocateur, tear gas, iron bars and live ammunition. Shooting teenagers is no solution. The rule of law is not rule by law; it is simply inflammatory. If all this leads to diplomats issuing a formal warning to businesses in the region, there will be a flight of capital. Beijing would therefore be far wiser to seek dialogue and compromise, rather than killing the goose and the golden egg—China’s most profitable financial centre.

In recent months, I have asked about the expulsion of journalists and the banning of political parties, and I have worked with Hong Kong Watch, of which I am a patron. I particularly thank Luke de Pulford and

Ben Rogers for their work and for bringing to Westminster the umbrella movement’s founders, Nathan Law and Joshua Wong, both of whom are totally committed to peaceful, non-violent protest but were jailed, with Nathan disqualified from the legislature. During this debate, we must discuss what the future holds for young people like them and for the city’s courageous people. Some 173 Members of both Houses have pressed the Foreign Secretary to lead an international initiative to guarantee second citizenship. The noble Lord, Lord Popat, will say more about this later, and I will refer to the position of BNO passport holders, but I think it would be helpful to the debate if, when the Minister comes to reply, he could tell us exactly how many people he believes are currently BNO passport holders. We will also hear today from many noble Lords with a great love of Hong Kong and its people, not least the noble Lord, Lord Patten of Barnes, and my noble friend Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, and many others with incredible knowledge about Hong Kong and China.

My own Hong Kong connections began when I was a student volunteer teaching English to families who had settled in Liverpool—home to one of Britain’s oldest Chinese communities—having escaped the cultural revolution. One of their descendants is my goddaughter. Liverpool was also the birthplace of William Gladstone, a vociferous opponent of the appalling opium trade, which he said was “at variance with justice”. The Opium Wars led, in 1842, to the treaty of Nanking, to the opening of five treaty ports to foreign merchants, and to the ceding, of course, of Hong Kong Island to the British Empire. It was in 1980, as a young Liverpool MP, that I first visited Hong Kong, and I subsequently went to Shanghai. There, I secretly met persecuted Christians whose bishop, Cardinal Ignatius Kung, had languished for 30 years in Chinese jails.

In 1979, it was against this backdrop that Margaret Thatcher had to negotiate with Deng Xiaoping the restitution of Hong Kong. In 1982, Deng told her:

“I could walk in and take the whole lot this afternoon”.

In a characteristic retort, the Prime Minister replied:

“There is nothing I could do to stop you, but the eyes of the world would now know what China is like”.

That is equally true today. The eyes of the world must stay trained on Hong Kong. Last week, the free world did just that when the US House of Representatives passed four pieces of bipartisan legislation, three of which were related to Hong Kong. But our eyes have seen other things too.

Thirty years ago, in Tiananmen Square, we saw the Red Army massacre 10,000 pro-democracy demonstrators, many of them young. We have also seen how Xi Jinping has been turning the clock back on Deng Xiaoping’s welcome attempts at reform. In June, on the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen, the regime said that the brutal suppression of those pro-democracy demonstrations had been good for society, describing it as a “vaccination” against political instability. We have also seen how Xi is repressing political dissent and religious belief. The assault on religion in China is the most systematic since the lethal cultural revolution, when churches were desecrated, looted, and turned into storerooms and factories. The religious were incarcerated, tortured, some burnt alive, some sent to

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

labour camps, with Christians publicly paraded through cities and towns and forced to wear cylindrical hats detailing their crime of belief.

Over the summer I met Hong Kong's Cardinal Zen and Martin Lee, the founder of Hong Kong's Democratic Party—a meeting that the Chinese authorities tried to stop. I heard their fears that religious persecution will be visited again on Hong Kong. President Xi may not yet have a Little Red Book, but he has replaced the 10 commandments with his sayings. In addition to the lack of religious freedom, churches, mosques and temples have been shut or demolished, leaders imprisoned and surveillance cameras installed. The European Parliament described the situation as “a new low”. Writing about surveillance, George Orwell famously said in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

“Big brother is watching you”.

But not just watching—Orwell said:

“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever”.

and that:

“The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history”.

For Buddhists in Tibet and Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang, Xi's Sinicisation programme seeks to do just that. To ensure that their history is obliterated, over 40 Uighur cemeteries have been destroyed, with bones and ancestors' remains scattered. At the APPG for Uighurs, of which I am vice-chairman, we heard disturbing evidence about the vile incarceration of 1 million Uighur Muslims, for them to be re-educated, brainwashed, intimidated, and reprogrammed. We have also seen disturbing evidence suggestive of why Uighur DNA is tested. Falun Gong practitioners told a parliamentary hearing how bodies have been turned into sources of forced human organ harvesting. An independent tribunal, chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, concluded that there is “incontrovertible evidence” that this has happened. We will hear more about this from my noble friends Lady Finlay and Lady Grey-Thompson. The Minister has the names of Chinese officials involved in this and other forms of persecution. Perhaps he will tell the House whether Magnitsky powers will be used to pursue those culpable.

Ministers and their officials need to be alive to China's use of censorship, economic pressure and fear and favour to try and silence criticism and to close the world's eyes to what is happening in Hong Kong. Perry Link, a Princeton academic, describes China's heavy-handed attempts to close and censor debates as the “anaconda in the chandelier”. But the anaconda is not just in the chandelier—it is the chandelier. President Xi's “great firewall” and dystopian “cyber sovereignty” is entrenched by laws that can result in job loss, years-long prison sentences or exile. This is not the free air of Hong Kong with unimpeded access to the internet, and Hong Kong has been watching all this with alarm.

In 2008, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate the late Liu Xiaobo, along with hundreds of others, published the pro-democracy and human rights manifesto *Charter 08*. He received a sentence of 11 years' imprisonment. He wrote that his crime was to,

“oppose systems of government that are dictatorships or monopolies ... Opposition is not equivalent to subversion”.

He looked to the day when,

“different values, ideas, beliefs, and political views ... can both compete with each other and peacefully coexist”.

The same thought was captured in the 1984 joint declaration, which said that Hong Kong's, “life-style shall remain unchanged for 50 years”.

This included,

“freedom of the person ... of the press, of assembly, of association ... of demonstration ... of belief”.

But we have watched with dismay as promises have been broken, legislators disqualified, mass arrests take place, employees dismissed and live ammunition replace any attempt to cultivate dialogue or to find solutions. And we have seen China tell the UK—the only other signatory to a legally binding joint declaration—that we have no right to express a view. We have seen China say that the 1984 treaty is null and void: a “historical document”, with “no practical significance” and no binding effect on the Chinese central Government's management of Hong Kong. So what must we do?

The United Kingdom has a unique moral and historic duty to bring together the international community in defence of the rule of law, democracy, free speech and human rights, and of “two systems, one country”. We should form an international contact group of like-minded nations to co-ordinate an international response. At next year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, in Kigali, countries should be urged to give all Hong Kong citizens an insurance policy of second citizenship and a place of abode, to be available if China continues to resile from the joint declaration.

I chaired a hearing about British National (Overseas) passport holders, including former police officers and the 250 military who served the Crown. Their plight was said by the late Lord Ashdown to be “worse than Windrush”. In a letter to me this week, the Home Secretary said that the Government have,

“no plans to amend the law”.

BNO passport holders are vulnerable and so are others with proven UK links. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that there is no legal impediment to us giving full British citizenship to those at risk and say whether we will help forge a comprehensive international solution for the people of Hong Kong.

Nobody wants anyone to have to leave Hong Kong. People are more likely to stay if they know that there will be ways to leave should the need arise. We should join the US in introducing legislation to strengthen the monitoring of the Sino-British joint declaration, with Magnitsky sanctions and the enactment of a Hong Kong human rights and democracy Act to hold perpetrators to account when it has been breached. We should ensure that, after Brexit, no free trade agreement is made with Hong Kong or China without a robust clause tied to the freedoms guaranteed in the Sino-British joint declaration. Trade law is critical and more enforceable than other forms of international law.

To conclude, the answers to Beijing's fears about separatism and its desire for unity, and a stable future are to be found in the free air of Hong Kong, not in the Uighur re-education camps of Xinjiang or in a repeat of the massacre at Tiananmen, or through

surveillance cameras or oppression. As Margaret Thatcher rightly said, the eyes of the world are on Hong Kong. We must stand in solidarity with them. In our day, we must neither avert our eyes or silence our voices. I beg to move.

2.50 pm

**Lord Pendry (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on giving the House the opportunity to discuss the current problems in Hong Kong. His Motion is commendable and worthy of the support of this House. Yes, we should encourage countries with better democratic and human rights policies to accept the people of Hong Kong to their shores at this time, but the conflict in Hong Kong is surely mainly the responsibility of this country; it is this country that should be in the forefront of doing what the noble Lord, Lord Alton, has ably given this House to discuss.

There are those who urge countries outside Hong Kong to avoid getting involved in a domestic dispute, but the conflict affects many other countries. In this vein, I was impressed to read in the *Washington Post* last week how the US Congress is being positive in its support for Hong Kong's struggling democracy by promoting legislation advancing in both the House of Representatives and the Senate to amend the United States–Hong Kong Policy Act 1992, a pillar of America's economic relationship with China and its special administrative region. Until now, the USA has treated Hong Kong differently from the People's Republic of China for trade purposes, but that is currently very much under review. Under the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act 2019, the US Secretary of State is required to certify whether Hong Kong remains, "sufficiently autonomous to justify special treatment by the United States ... including the degree to which Hong Kong's autonomy has been eroded due to actions taken by the Government of China".

The Bill would, under the terms of Magnitsky Act, require the President of the United States to freeze the US-based assets of, and deny entry to the US by, any individual formerly responsible for abducting human rights activists in Hong Kong. Surely, this lead is very helpful and commendable and puts our own Government to some shame, considering our governorship of Hong Kong before the handover. Our Government should be in the forefront of opposing the barbaric measures taking place in Hong Kong today.

By way of conclusion, because of the time limit, I draw attention to an issue I raised last week in a debate, whereby students from mainland China in British universities are bullying and harassing fellow students from Hong Kong who support those demonstrating in support of the Sino-British declaration's initial aims. I did not get a response from the Minister when he wound up then; perhaps I will today. Students at our universities should be given proper guidance on freedom of speech as part of their conditions of entry to universities in this country. It is important that students supporting the Beijing Government should not bring their standards of speech and tactics to these shores and our universities. If the Government are not prepared to take the lead in defending Hong Kong students and others at our universities, the obvious leader of that

battle for freedom of speech should be the most qualified of all—none other than the noble Lord, Lord Patten of Barnes, who is in his place. He is chancellor of the best university in the land—Oxford—and I hope he does not mind me landing him with another job at this time.

Again, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, a great advocate for freedom and justice, not only in Hong Kong but universally.

2.54 pm

**Lord Patten of Barnes (Con):** I think my interests are all registered, not least the fact that, like my friend the noble Lord, Lord Wilson, I had the privilege of being Governor of Hong Kong for five years, the greatest privilege I have ever had.

The joint declaration incorporating "one country, two systems" was an extraordinary clever, adept way of coping with an issue that was politically and morally difficult for both China and the United Kingdom. It was morally difficult for China because it knew that more than half the population of Hong Kong were refugees from events in China under a communist regime. It was morally difficult for Britain because it was pretty well our only colony that we were not preparing for independence with democratic structures. When occasionally in the 1960s and 1970s Britain talked about greater democracy in Hong Kong, Chinese officials, including, famously, Zhou Enlai, made it clear they did not want that, because it would give people in Hong Kong the idea that they were going to turn out something like Singapore or Malaysia one day—an independent country.

Moreover, it was always the Chinese Government's position that the future of the people in Hong Kong was nothing to do with the people of Hong Kong. It all had to be determined by the British and Chinese Governments. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that for a dozen or more years after 1997, one country, two systems worked extraordinarily well. There was some rowing back by the Chinese Government on the pledges they had made on the introduction of greater democracy in Hong Kong, saying at a number of points that this was a matter for people in Hong Kong. The joint liaison office, their main point of contact in Hong Kong, threw its weight around too much, but by and large things went pretty well. I think the caesura in Hong Kong, and in the development of China, in the past few years has been the election of Xi Jinping as head of the Communist Party and President of China. Just as that has changed attitudes to economic matters in China, it has had an impact on political issues as well. There has certainly been a tightening of Beijing's control over Hong Kong in the past few years.

That is the backdrop to what has happened since the extraordinarily foolish introduction of the extradition Bill. That was seen, not just by pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong but by the business community, as an attempt to dismember the firewall between the rule of law in Hong Kong and whatever passes for the law—I note what the noble Lord, Lord Alton, had to say—in mainland China. We saw the huge demonstrations, which began peacefully but have unfortunately developed a violent edge in the past few months. Bear in mind that this has been going on for four months now.

[LORD PATTEN OF BARNES]

I commend to the House an extremely good article in *Asian Affairs* by a retired Hong Kong police officer about what has happened in dealing with those demonstrations. First, he pointed out that, starting with the demonstrations on 12 June, which were around the government buildings, the police began to target not just the people behaving violently but a lot of those who were being perfectly peaceful. Secondly, we had the appalling affair in the MTR station and Yuen Long in July, when it was plainly the case that triads and other gangsters were used to beat up demonstrators to help in the policing. All those issues, along with the broader economic and social matters, justify establishing a commission of inquiry. That has been pressed for some months, including by the former Chief Justice Andrew Li and others. It is the most sensible way forward, and I implore the Government to do that in Hong Kong.

I also implore the demonstrators to recognise that they play into the hands of the Communist Party when they are violent. However, you have to understand that, when you say to them, “You will lose the moral high ground if you behave violently”, they say, “If we are on the moral high ground, who will be there with us? Who will be talking to us?”, because nobody addresses them or tries to form some sort of consensus with them. They are also extremely critical of the way the demonstrations have been policed, which has not been the greatest example of the behaviour of what used to be—and I hope still will be—a great Asian police force.

I will say three things in conclusion. First, I implore not just the demonstrators to give up the violence, but also Beijing to give the Government in Hong Kong, whether Carrie Lam or anybody else, the elbow room to make some accommodations with the demonstrators. Secondly, I implore the Chinese Government to behave more sensibly in general; most of us have received a rather impertinent letter this morning from the Foreign Ministry, which is a very good example of how the Chinese think that international laws and treaties they have signed must be followed by everybody else but not by them. Lastly, I refer to the Foreign Minister saying that all this has been whipped up by the CIA and foreign forces. It is always a weakness of authoritarian regimes that they do not understand what is happening below. That always causes difficulties.

I have one final point—I am sorry for going on for slightly longer than I should have. In 2016 I made a speech in Hong Kong saying that I would always support movements for democracy but was totally against any efforts to campaign for independence for Hong Kong, because it was not going to happen and it would be immoral of me to support it. Joshua Wong and others said, “Would you go along and talk to students, and say exactly the same thing?” I addressed 700 students at the University of Hong Kong and made those same points; I did the same the following year, and in between nobody from the Government had talked to them. At the end of that first session, the students said to me, “It’s all very well, Governor Patten, you coming along and making those sorts of remarks, but what happens if the Chinese continue to squeeze us? What will the rest of the world do? What will you do in

Britain? What will the United States do? What will Europe do? What will you do personally?” It is a very good question.

3.03 pm

**Lord Alderdice (LD):** My Lords, it is a great honour to follow the noble Lord, Lord Patten of Barnes, not just because of his distinguished governorship of Hong Kong but because of the time he spent in Northern Ireland, a place beloved by both him and me, and his distinguished chancellorship of Oxford University, where I find great intellectual nourishment and run a small centre dealing with intractable conflict. It is also always a great pleasure to participate in debates led and hosted by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, who brings not only all his passion and enthusiasm but a thoroughly well-grounded and well-informed speech to start us off. I ask myself what I can usefully contribute after such valuable, insightful and experienced contributions. I will pick up where the noble Lord, Lord Patten of Barnes, left off: what can we do?

Can the Minister say whether there is any preparedness on the part of Her Majesty’s Government seriously to review the whole approach that has been taken to engagement with China over the last 20 years? I think it was largely informed by a view that, if markets were opened and there was economic engagement with China, a more liberal, democratic approach would, if not inevitably, most likely follow. There is a great vogue for evidence-based medicine. If there was any such thing as evidence-based politics, the evidence is clear that economic openings have not led to liberal democracy. On the contrary, the situation is getting much worse.

The Minister has freedom of religion or belief as one of his many responsibilities in government. As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, pointed out, the situation on freedom of religion or belief in China itself is deteriorating in a quite extraordinary way. The Chinese Government do not make any apology for it or try to hide it; it is absolutely up front as part of their policy that, unless you follow the beliefs, culture and approach of the Chinese Government and the Communist Party, you are to be squeezed out. I read phrases such as “their bones will be crushed and thrown aside”. These are incredibly dangerous, as well as obnoxious, words from anyone, but from a Head of State and Government they are unforgivable. Are Her Majesty’s Government therefore prepared to review the approach that we have taken?

When Mr Blair was in government, he was very much of the belief that this was the way to engage. Resources were taken away from many other parts of the world and put into engagement with China because this was the way forward and we could not do without it. If China believes that that is the case, anything we say about Hong Kong or any of the other abuses in China will simply be brushed aside. What does this require? I make one specific proposition: that when it comes to business, our approach to human rights becomes an important agenda item. One reason why Hong Kong was allowed to continue as it was, at least for a period, was that it was the jewel in the crown of China’s economic prospects.

It is absolutely clear that many businesses are now reassessing whether Hong Kong is the place to be; some are moving to Singapore, others elsewhere. However,

it will not do what is necessary if they simply quietly slip away. It is important that it is made very clear to Beijing and the current Administration in Hong Kong that businesses will leave, should leave and may well be encouraged to leave if the human rights situation does not improve and more prospects are not given. I support the call that, at the next Commonwealth meeting, the question be raised of whether—we must do this along with other countries, though we will have to take a lead if we are to ask others—BNO passport holders will be given the opportunity to relocate. It is the best possibility not only for their future but for maintaining them there with some confidence that they have alternatives.

3.09 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Salisbury:** My Lords, I too am grateful for this debate, initiated by the noble Lord, Lord Alton. There is a very high level of knowledge and expertise in the House: therefore, I make this contribution with some diffidence. However, the church in Hong Kong plays a significant part in the life of the community there, where it is distinctive, both in terms of worship and religious freedom but also education and social care. Hong Kong has a unique history, and this country has particular responsibilities.

The parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, where I was vicar before becoming Bishop of Salisbury, has had a Cantonese-speaking, Hong Kong-based congregation for more than 50 years. At the handover there was some anxiety and much hope for a Hong Kong which developed as a special administrative region and was able to look both ways, inside China and out from China, uniquely connecting China to the wider world.

We want to stand with the people of Hong Kong. The question is: with which people, and how? It is a place with, to some extent, competing different views of the world. For mainland Chinese, the pride of the nation's development is measured in education, employment, economic prosperity and healthcare. In Hong Kong, there is a deep commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and religious freedom. The way in which the protests have been challenged and policed has been exacerbated by the use of artificial intelligence in the visual recognition of protesters, the ban on face masks, and so on. The different views of the world are not necessarily opposites, but they are very different emphases. Maybe the role of those of us outside is to exert pressure—to push together the best of what it is to be human, and people together.

The current disruption has its roots in the extradition Bill, as well as in housing, income inequality and a lack of social mobility. However, it is much more to do with identity. At the handover, it was assumed by some, for better and for worse, that in time, Hong Kong would lose its distinctiveness. For others, Hong Kong brought something distinctive to the Chinese polity, religion, and social and economic life. Now, those aged under 35 in Hong Kong see themselves as Hong Kongers first and Chinese second. In other words, Hong Kong's identity has been hardened and has grown more significant, not less.

Of course, the Anglican Church in Hong Kong condemns violence but supports lawful and peaceful protest. From the perspective of Hong Kong leaders,

it is less than helpful for foreign politicians to tell Hong Kong and Chinese people what to do and how to behave. The task for us is to work out how to exert pressure from outside so that we stand alongside those to whom we have not just a historic but a present commitment, to encourage the keeping of treaties and international law, and the finding of a peaceful resolution to the present conflicts.

3.12 pm

**Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB):** My Lords, it is a great privilege to be able to participate in this debate.

For decades, when visiting vibrant, colourful, lively, bustling Hong Kong, we have seen rapid change melded with Chinese culture, keeping traditions alive, including music on ancient rare instruments. When Bradbury Hospice opened in 1992, supported by Lady Patten and the Jockey Club, several fine compassionate doctors sought palliative medicine specialist education through Cardiff and established world-class services, founded on deep humanity and high clinical standards, sensitive to Cantonese culture. When SARS happened, they cared for those dying and helped contain it.

As we have heard, Cantonese religious traditions are broad and varied. Some British, interned by the Japanese invaders during the last war, gained inner strength from St John's Cathedral church's ad hoc services, and today its Filipino Christian fellowship supports those in domestic service.

Following handover, Hong Kong's gentle realignment with mainland China became palpable, while keeping its own distinct identity. Meanwhile, China has developed at an astonishing rate, across all disciplines. To the outsider, China has nothing to fear from Hong Kong—but Hong Kong now fears China, whose more than 1.4 billion people represent almost 19% of the world's population.

In the early 1990s, Falun Gong, with its Buddhist origins and fundamental tenets of truthfulness, compassion and forbearance, was favoured by the People's Republic of China. As it became popular, it was proscribed by the atheistic state, and adherents appear to have been systematically persecuted, imprisoned in labour camps without cause, tortured and an unknown number killed. They are prisoners of conscience, along with Uighurs, house Christians, and Tibetans.

Those of us in rich, vibrant societies cannot understand what the perceived threat is to the communist state from people whose philosophy is non-violent and peaceful at all times. Yet now there is extensive evidence that China has been killing its Falun Gong prisoners of conscience to remove organs for commercial human transplantation. I recently met Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, chairman of the Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China, whose judgment makes harrowing reading. That evidence-based judgment, delivered in June this year, followed the earlier interim judgment that:

“The Tribunal's members are certain—unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt—that in China forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practised for a substantial period of time involving a very substantial number of victims”.

Is it possible that some doctors could perpetrate such crimes against humanity, even at times taking organs before the person was clinically dead? Shamefully, it

[BARONESS FINLAY OF LLANDAFF] seems so. The tribunal's findings cannot be buried along with the bodies of the victims, so will the Government support the Bill of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, to cut off demand from any UK residents who want to participate in this transplant tourism?

How do we come to terms with this huge country, with whom we work well and trade on a daily basis? We welcome Chinese students to our universities and work with China on many major projects. Cardiff Metropolitan University, which I chair, recently welcomed the Deputy Premier of China and his team to our ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre to help China develop public health training programmes in food handling. In many scientific and medical disciplines, excellent quality work in research and teaching is being undertaken. Collaboration across boundaries should benefit all.

Now, as Hong Kong cries out for open government, we have a moral duty to all those British passport holders. We must not abandon the strength and integrity of these people. We will lose highly skilled Europeans through Brexit, yet Hong Kong British should have open entry to the UK. China has nothing to fear from open ethical practices, but much to fear from abusing human rights. Meanwhile, the British people of Hong Kong, living by our code and legal system, must not be abandoned through wilful blindness.

3.17 pm

**Lord Carrington (CB):** My Lords, I have lived and worked in Hong Kong and have been a frequent visitor to China since the early 1980s. This debate comes at a time when tensions in Hong Kong are extremely high, and the prospects of greater violence are increasing. Estimates are that up to 10% of the demonstrators are using violence, and that these people are well resourced and uncompromising. I see nothing to be gained by raking over the recent events and trying to apportion blame. For every rumour of the involvement of PRC undercover agents there is a counter-rumour of CIA interference. This gets us nowhere. The overwhelming priority is to end the violent protests of the extremists, who are damaging the very cause that they uphold, as well as at the same time moving quickly to much-needed and unforgivably delayed reforms in Hong Kong.

I am a supporter of the joint declaration and the approach of one country, two systems. This was a substantial victory for common sense and was to the advantage of all sides. Unfortunately, rather than seeing this as a holistic concept, some people have concentrated on one rather than the other, which has led to many of the problems we see today.

An old Chinese saying describes this perfectly: "two people sleeping in the same bed dreaming different dreams". However, on balance China has adhered to the agreement because it is in the interests of China so to do. Hong Kong remains the pre-eminent financial centre in China and Asia. It is also of paramount importance to Chinese relations with Taiwan going forward.

Unless there is a complete breakdown of law and order in Hong Kong, I do not see the likelihood of a Chinese invasion. I also do not believe that, if the

authorities introduce the necessary reforms, the structure will change even after 2047. If it works, it is good for China and Hong Kong.

The problems in Hong Kong are principally home grown, in that it has had various ineffective Governments since 1997, which have failed to introduce much-needed reforms in a variety of sectors, both social and structural. While the population of China has become increasingly affluent, the population of Hong Kong, with the exception of the rich, has become poorer and consequently more disaffected. Some of this is due to the dollar peg, which has caused massive asset inflation, which benefits the haves rather than the have-nots.

The incompetence of the Administration has not been assisted by its poor briefings and overall handling of the media, which sometimes gives a very one-sided view of events. The constitution and performance of LegCo is a big stumbling block. It is less than representative and too pro-Beijing. Its composition needs to be changed. The fault is not all that of the Government, as the behaviour of some democratic Members has been appalling, with outright and needless insults to the very name of China. This lack of respect does no one any good.

Much needs attention, and we in Britain should be clearly pointing this out to the Hong Kong Government. These matters are arguably more important than issues around passports which, we hope, will never be required. If the "one country, two systems" framework is made to work, it is to the overwhelming advantage of both Hong Kong and China. Hong Kongers will have little interest in passports. That is why all our current efforts should be directed to this objective alone.

First and foremost, the Government must restore law and order by giving their wholesale backing, including resources and training, to the police. The police are the first and only line of civic defence in Hong Kong, unlike in other countries. They are fellow Hong Kong citizens speaking Cantonese and with houses and children at the same schools in the community. They are not the PLA, which has none of these features or local relationships. It does not matter where in the civilised world you are: if you stab a policeman carrying out his duty, you are likely to get hurt as well as arrested, even if you are a 12 year-old. In the current circumstances, now that the Government have enacted the emergency law, they need to enforce it. The implementation of the face mask ban was a farce.

The police are already stretched and, unless they get full support, disintegration of the force could well begin. There have been no fatalities yet, but that is where things are headed. Once violent demonstrations are ended and there is a return to peaceful protest, the chief executive can start the conciliation process with inquiries and measures to reform LegCo, housing and much else. With compromise, good faith and good will, and without stirring nationalist sentiment, this can be solved. The Hong Kong Government's withdrawal of the extradition Bill and their apology for the unintended spraying of paint at the Kowloon Mosque is a good start.

3.24 pm

**Lord Chidgey (LD):** My Lords, the Chinese position now—that the “one country, two systems” agreement is obsolete and no longer valid—is a clear breach of an international treaty, ratified in the UN, which enshrines the autonomy, rights and freedoms in the Hong Kong Basic Law. In response to an Urgent Question on 26 September, the Foreign Secretary confirmed that the United Kingdom expected China to live up to its obligations. He confirmed that he had spoken to the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, and made clear our concerns about human rights and the mistreatment of those exercising their right to lawful and peaceful protest. He said that their concerns should be addressed, not crushed by force.

That is a fine and noble sentiment from the Foreign Secretary, but there is scant evidence, more than a month on, of a positive Chinese reaction—until this morning, when it was announced that the extradition Bill had been withdrawn, according to the *Times*. But that is only one of five key demands of the protesters.

The Foreign Secretary also said that our international partners had placed on record their strong support and that the Prime Minister had raised Hong Kong at a recent G7 meeting, where all partners supported the joint declaration and called for an end to violence. The Foreign Secretary stressed to the Chinese Government that it was Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy that guaranteed its future prosperity and success.

Again, there was no positive response from the Chinese, apart from saying, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton, mentioned, that the Sino-British joint declaration was an historical document that no longer had any practical significance and had no binding effect on the Chinese central Government’s management of Hong Kong. The British, the statement said, have no sovereignty after the handover, nor power to rule or power to supervise. That is a pretty clear statement, but wildly divergent from the fact that the treaty is registered with the UN, remains in force and obliges both signatories to adhere to the terms they agreed.

Over the past several weeks, Members have received a steady flow of emails from Hong Kongers, some setting out their analysis of the situation with great fluency. I will not give names, for fear of retribution, but outstanding arguments include:

“Unlike other British Overseas Territories, the British Hong Kong residents were denied a vote on the future. The land and the people were handed over to the Chinese without asking their consent”.

“Hong Kong Britons born in British Hong Kong before the handover were British by birth. After the handover, those of Chinese descent had Chinese nationality brutally imposed by Beijing. It is now impossible for them to register as British citizens due to the imposition of Chinese nationality”.

“Beijing is not concerned about the justifiable rights of the Hong Kong people, but only on how to silence opposition views”. That is just a sample of the many emails that I and others have received appealing for help.

Should the situation in Hong Kong be seen as part of the broader picture of Chinese foreign policy? Most people will be familiar with China’s belt and road initiative—a massive infrastructure and investment

project, a new Silk Road to transport Chinese goods through the heart of central Asia and into Europe, with defined maritime routes through and beyond the Indian Ocean, served by a string of naval bases, including in Sri Lanka and Djibouti, to protect their passage.

It smacks of imperialism on a global scale not seen since the 18th and 19th centuries. Chinese foreign policy includes extending territorial claims to a network of disputed islands, reefs and atolls throughout the South China Sea, stretching into the Pacific and closing on Australia. Harbour and airport facilities with military capabilities and defence infrastructure have mushroomed on islands that make up the Paracels and Spratlys.

China has just secured a 75-year renewable lease on the whole of the island of Tulagi in the heart of the Solomon Islands, complete with fully functional naval and air bases initially provided by the Allied forces in World War II. Last month, China persuaded the Solomon Islands to join Kiribati in switching diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing.

There are worries, particularly in the US and Australia, that these developments provide a foothold for establishing a military presence in their backyard. The annual Bersama Lima military exercise is currently in full swing, with the intention of five nations combining to provide defence across Asia from a potential Chinese conventional threat: the front line. However, the allies’ combined power compared to China’s is extraordinary: the details do not bear reading. However, given that military engagement would seem an invidious course of action, we must examine combined economic and other actions to persuade China to address the plight of the Hong Kongers. In the words of Hong Kongers:

“Hong Kong is not Hong Kong anymore. No freedom, no justice, not safe. Please help to save the Hong Kongers’ life”.

I look forward to the Minister’s response.

3.29 pm

**Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Alton for tabling this debate and for his continued interest in this area. I am speaking today in part not only because of the significant number of emails that I have received on this issue even before I put my name down to speak, but also because I have visited many countries that are being ripped apart by genocide, war and civil unrest. I have also been fascinated by the evolving relationship between sport and politics as countries have transitioned away from the Empire into the Commonwealth, which has led to my interest in Hong Kong.

I watched in real time the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, although personally I have never been comfortable with the word “handover” when talking about people. I was fascinated by the provisions of the joint declaration and how citizens would be protected during the transition and beyond. Many of the letters I have received are from individuals asking for protection and support as British national overseas citizens. They talk about feeling abandoned and their only protection being to look to us to hold China to account. Many say that we have a historical and moral responsibility to do so. They talk of cases of universal suffrage not being upheld, activists being banned from running elections and the impact of religious intolerance. Perhaps there

[BARONESS GREY-THOMPSON]

are not many positive things about Brexit, but one is that in this country we have the right to protest in relative safety. In Hong Kong, however, we see real fear playing out on the streets.

As I researched this subject, I became aware of the work of Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, a distinguished prosecutor and respected expert in crimes of mass atrocity and forced organ harvesting. One could say that on the one hand that China has been at the forefront of medical developments, but we have to consider at what cost. In 2004, 13,000 organ transplants were carried out in China, but where are the organs coming from? It has been publicly known for many years and was reported on in 2009 in *China Daily* that approximately 65% of transplanted organs still come from death row prisoners. That brings me back to the work of Sir Geoffrey Nice. In the final judgment of the China tribunal, he said:

“Forced organ harvesting has been committed for years through China on a significant scale and that Falun Gong practitioners have been one—and probably the main source of organ supply. The concerted persecution and medical testing of the Uyghurs is more recent and it may be that evidence of forced organ harvesting of this group may emerge in due course”,

and that,

“forced organ harvesting continues till this day”.

We can perhaps understand why Chinese transplant professionals and the Government chose not to participate in the tribunal. Lu Kang, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said on 30 June:

“Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China and Hong Kong’s affairs are China’s internal affairs ... Now that Hong Kong has returned to its motherland for 20 years, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, as a historical document, no longer has any practical significance, and does not have any binding effect on the Chinese central government’s management of Hong Kong”.

That does not fill me with positive hope.

I should like to ask Her Majesty’s Government whether this is really acceptable. Where is our moral responsibility? I have a number of friends who have received organ transplants. I have seen them wait, I have seen the pain they go through and I have seen those who have passed away. Organ transplantation saves lives, but there is no place for organ tourism or for enforced organ harvesting. This is just one of many fears we must address for the citizens of Hong Kong.

3.33 pm

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** My Lords, Hong Kong had everything going for it, including a fabulous future as part of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay area, which was and still is destined to be one of the richest, most innovative and powerful regions on the entire planet. Mention of the British national (overseas) passport issue sent me to my filing cabinet, where a dusty file reminded me that 24 years ago I had the privilege of leading the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee to a five-day inquiry in the old LegCo on Hong Kong island, where we conducted hearings on exactly the same issue: whether the British national (overseas) passport should give right of abode to the United Kingdom. We concluded that it should not, but that we thought that certain categories of people should be admitted. They have been admitted

progressively under quotas since then. We thought that the passport status was part of the Sino-British declaration that had been signed a year before in 1994, that we should leave it as part of the declaration, and that we should respect the whole declaration because we hoped and believed that it would give Hong Kong 50 years of prosperity and stability.

For 20 years it did, but what on earth went wrong? We know that the clumsy extradition law was the trigger and that it has now been withdrawn. However, in my view there is blame that lies in Beijing, in London and in Hong Kong itself. Whether we like it or not, the international legal position is clear. Under the declaration and our agreements, Hong Kong is now a sovereign part of the People’s Republic of China. The joint declaration was always based on an understanding that in the future, after signature, there would be a degree of trust and respect, along with constant dialogue with Beijing, as well as with the Hong Kong authorities, on the necessary reform and modernisation that has taken place, given that the whole world has been completely transformed since those days.

There was also a degree of ambiguity and compromise in the declaration. There had to be—there always is in these complicated situations. One problem is that in the digital age, when everyone is pushed to extremes, moderation is cast aside and all nuances are neglected, there is hyper-communication that is very difficult to handle because everyone is driven to taking extreme positions. For instance, China simply carries on asserting that the declaration is null and void and Britain has nothing to do with it and should stay out of the picture, while we, the other hand, keep on bravely asserting a point that is legally true, which that it is a binding agreement. These are counter-assertions that get us nowhere. They are exactly the sort of megaphone diplomacy that the father of the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, warned us against many decades ago. There has to be a dialogue of respect, trust and understanding, and the positive necessity is for that to be recreated now.

I think it was the former Prime Minister John Major who said to the people of Hong Kong, “We will never forget you”, but in fact we did forget them. We forgot the essential dialogue element needed to keep the situation under proper control. It is now utterly in China’s interests to see the Hong Kong situation restored and pacified. It is also utterly in Hong Kong’s interests to see that it reassumes its place in the fantastic and fabulous financial future as a hub of the whole world’s system of modern government and trade.

What do we need now and what can we do? We can urge that a detailed inquiry be held into the grievances. It may be that a new Chief Executive is required to bring a new approach to the whole situation. Above all, we need full and continuing dialogue with the PRC and the people in Beijing, who are not totally ignorant of what is happening or the dangers it poses for China and everyone else, about what was intended when we signed the declaration and how it needs to be constantly nurtured and reformed. That is where we should put all our efforts. It is something we have not done; now we should start doing it.

3.38 pm

**Lord Hogan-Howe (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for this opportunity to speak. I am no great expert on Hong Kong but I hope to make clear why I wanted to speak today. Previously, I was chief constable of Merseyside Police which lays claim to the oldest Chinese community in Europe and has the largest Chinese arch outside China. It is a great community, as is the large community in London. Its members are always very law-abiding, integrated with the wider community and supportive of each other. There are links historically to the former Royal Hong Kong Police Force through visits and trips.

The situation in Hong Kong appears to be deteriorating rather than improving. Large-scale protests are being held on a daily basis, with reports of serious violence and damage. My concerns relate to the behaviour of the Hong Kong police in dealing with those demonstrations. I remind the House in passing that, although the Hong Kong authorities have been criticised for passing legislation making it illegal to wear a mask, it is illegal to wear a mask in this country when, under certain conditions, a person refuses to remove it on the request of a police officer. It is not only in Hong Kong that we see this type of legislation.

I know just how difficult it is to police protests. The people protesting always feel strongly about the issue they are advocating. It can be a serious issue of principle for those people and often involves a passionate commitment to the cause they espouse. The majority of a crowd usually do not wish to be involved in violence, but their presence can be a way for those who intend to be violent to be hidden and to make it difficult for law enforcement agencies to deal with them.

My natural sympathies can therefore lie with any police force faced with that type of operation. However, I am afraid I have become increasingly concerned by the TV images of the police response in Hong Kong and the reports of respected bodies that have observed serious police misconduct and have evidence of human rights abuse. Both Hong Kong Watch and Amnesty International have published worrying accounts of police excesses.

As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, mentioned, a recent Amnesty International report confirms,

“an alarming pattern of the Hong Kong Police Force deploying reckless and indiscriminate tactics”,

in their arrests, as well as beating and torturing people in detention. The same report states that detained protesters have been “severely beaten” and that this, “appears to have been meted out ... for talking back”,

or being unco-operative. Worryingly, there are repeated reports of sexual violence in police detention. Further, as we have heard again today, there are reports of police firing live ammunition at protesters.

I accept that Hong Kong police are armed and, if they become isolated in a crowd, may use a weapon for self-defence—but I am afraid that the use of a firearm in a political protest is always a very serious development and increases the risk that the protesters will respond by arming themselves and using firearms in return. That is always the most serious turn of events at a protest, politically as well as practically. Finally, we

have seen reports of a journalist being shot with a rubber bullet despite being clearly identified as a member of the press.

What steps are the Government taking to make sure that the Hong Kong Government establish an independent judge-led inquiry into these abuses? Have the Government considered raising with the UN Security Council the recent breaches of the human rights captured in the Sino-British joint declaration? What steps have the Government taken to investigate reports of sexual violence against young protesters in detention? Finally, will the Government make formal diplomatic representation to raise concerns about all these issues?

3.42 pm

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** My Lords, I am most grateful to my noble friend Lord Alton for bringing this debate and for his ongoing commitment to raising the issues of China and Hong Kong. I say “my noble friend” advisedly. I have not slipped into the wrong Benches; I think of the noble Lord as a friend.

Like the right reverend Prelate, I speak with some diffidence this afternoon. Hong Kong is not my area of expertise, and in your Lordships’ House it is always a little dangerous to speak from a position of no expertise. In particular, I am aware that—apart from former governors—we have young Hong Kongers watching us today. I agreed to speak precisely because, like my noble friend Lord Chidgey, I started receiving emails. Some probably came to all Members of your Lordships’ House. One came from somebody I knew, no longer resident in Hong Kong, who said, “I want you to make clear to Parliament what the real situation is like in Hong Kong”.

My sense is that noble Lords contributing to this debate need no lessons on what the situation is like in Hong Kong, but I felt that so many people were writing that it was important, as an ordinary Member of the Lords, to take a bit more time to find out what is happening in Hong Kong and at least raise my voice in support of those people in Hong Kong seeking what so many young people in the United Kingdom want. They want freedom, democracy and autonomy. After all, what have we been doing for the last three and a half years but trying to talk about freedom, democracy and autonomy, albeit in a slightly different format?

The situation with Hong Kong is a sui generis case. If what is happening in Hong Kong were happening in mainland China, the Chinese authorities would simply say, “This is about our sovereign territory. Please go away. We don’t interfere in your politics. Please don’t interfere in ours”. But the situation with the Sino-British joint declaration is different.

One of my questions to the Minister is: to what extent do the Government really feel they can play a part? In answer to my noble friend Lady Northover on 7 October, he said the Government are,

“fully committed to upholding Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy and its rights and freedoms as enshrined in the ‘one country, two systems’ framework”.—[*Official Report*, 7/10/19; col. 1903.]

How do Her Majesty’s Government plan to do this? We have not so far seen much evidence of it.

[BARONESS SMITH OF NEWNHAM]

Among the other areas that have not been much discussed today are fake news and suicides. The noble Lord, Lord Carrington, said that there have not yet been any fatalities, but various people have said in their emails that what has changed in recent months is the number of unexplained suicides: people who appear to have perhaps fallen from a building, but nobody saw or heard them fall. Is it possible for Her Majesty's Government to ask what is happening with this and whether the rule of law is being upheld? There are clearly questions about people dying in unexplained circumstances.

We are in a very difficult time. Several Members of your Lordships' House have already mentioned residency for British nationals overseas, but there is a clear disparity among Hong Kongers. Some have BNO status, some have BOC status and some born after 1997 have neither status. They would not have a right of abode even if Her Majesty's Government decided to give BNO citizens the right to reside in the United Kingdom.

What are Her Majesty's Government able to do about the rights of Hong Kong citizens? Clearly it is vital that Hong Kong becomes again a place where people want to remain and exercise their rights under the Sino-British agreement. However, if that is not possible, what guarantees can be given to Hong Kong citizens, whatever their original nationality? If we have one country, two systems, there should not be three or four different citizenships.

3.47 pm

**Baroness Hooper (Con):** My Lords, although I cannot claim the same extent of expertise in relation to Hong Kong and China as many who have spoken so far and many from whom we are yet to hear, I have had the pleasure of going to Hong Kong on several occasions and I have friends who live and work there.

I also was asked to add my signature to the letter initiated by Hong Kong Watch and sent to the Foreign Secretary recently, and I welcome the tone of his reply. However, one point arising from the Foreign Secretary's reply to that letter—which I hope my noble friend the Minister can clarify—is the reference to his having spoken to a wide range of his counterparts internationally to encourage their support. Does this include the European Union? It was not listed in the Foreign Secretary's letter, and we are after all still members and can still benefit from a united voice from Europe to carry weight in China. I hope he will tell us that this issue has been raised at that level. I would like to hear more about the reaction from other Commonwealth countries.

It is always difficult to know how best to support action against human rights abuses, and some of the horrific examples quoted today and the limitation on freedoms in Hong Kong require positive action by the United Kingdom. So, in spite of the advice to the contrary of the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, I support the suggestion that the United Kingdom should provide an insurance policy of second citizenship and the right of abode. I see this as a part of our responsibility under the joint declaration. Can the Minister give an indication of the numbers involved if this approach should be taken?

On the wider issue of the protests, I have mixed feelings. I agree with those who consider that they have gone on too long, and I deplore the increasing violence on both sides. At the moment, protests and lengthy demonstrations seem to be springing up all over the world—witness Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Barcelona, and even here we have seen the recent paralysis of central London for almost two weeks—so we can all understand how the consequences of such protracted action can impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. However sympathetic one might be about the cause of the protest, patience can wear thin. We do not want that to happen in Hong Kong. I hope, therefore, that we can show tangible support for the grievances of the protestors and, by doing so, encourage them not to further provoke and escalate the violence and disproportionate force that we have all witnessed on our television screens.

I congratulate and thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on giving us this opportunity to show our support for the people of Hong Kong.

3.51 pm

**Lord Loomba (CB):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Alton for securing this important debate and ensuring that the voices of the supporters of democracy in Hong Kong are heard in this House.

Hong Kong was my second home, as I had my office there from 1984 to 1995, and I always found it a peaceful place. The recent scenes of unrest in Hong Kong have become increasingly disturbing as hostility towards the pro-democracy protestors grows. The ban by the Hong Kong Administration on wearing face masks has been counterproductive and only served to increase protests. Many people in Hong Kong believe the umbrella revolution in 2014 did not work and their frustration at the perceived violations to the “one country, two systems” agreement is growing.

As I am sure your Lordships' House is aware, the protests began over an extradition treaty that would have allowed citizens of Hong Kong to be extradited to China. This caused alarm, a public outcry and led to the huge conflicts between police and protestors which have shocked the world. While the Bill to enact this legislation has been withdrawn, there are still many issues to be addressed.

Both sides, the UK and China, signed up to the Sino-British joint declaration agreement to respect Hong Kong's traditions and way of life. Any actions contrary to the agreement should be swiftly addressed by the UK Government. We must do more—and fast—to ensure that democracy in Hong Kong is preserved and that the values the people hold dear are not eroded beyond all repair. Having an elected Administration and not one appointed by the Chinese Government, so that Hong Kong residents have faith in the running of Hong Kong, is a first step. The UK Government should insist this on to achieve real results.

While the calls to offer citizenship here and in other Commonwealth countries to BNO passport holders may help in the short term, and I support any moves to do so, it does nothing to resolve the issues faced by Hong Kong residents in the long term. The key issue is

the fragility of democracy in Hong Kong at present. With more and more stories surfacing of ill-treatment of protestors by the police, the rule of law appears to be being violated. It cannot be right that the police can act with impunity and without proper systems in place to hold them to account for their behaviour.

Another issue that particularly stands out for me is the need to protect protesting citizens from being targeted by the Hong Kong Administration and the Chinese Government. What is being done by the Government to create dialogue with the protestors in order to bring about democratic reform in a reasoned way and to ensure that the dialogue is with bone fide protestors and not infiltrators? This is an important point, as it is only through careful and considered dialogue on all sides that we have any hope of bringing the situation to a peaceful resolution.

3.55 pm

**Lord Sassoon (Con):** My Lords, I refer to my business interests in Hong Kong and mainland China as set out in the register. As someone involved in business in Hong Kong, I record my sadness and concern at the events of recent months. I add my condolences to all those affected by the news that 39 citizens of China died in yesterday's appalling lorry tragedy.

Like other speakers in this debate, I condemn the violence. It has seriously threatened the well-being of the community and has taken a significant toll on the whole of Hong Kong and its international standing. I strongly support efforts to restore law and order for the greater good of the people of Hong Kong. To move forward, Hong Kong's community needs to work together to restore the confidence of that great city and ensure the well-being and harmony of all its people.

The rule of law and the "one country, two systems" principle enshrined in the Basic Law are fundamental to the strength and stability of Hong Kong. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's view is that "one country, two systems" has worked well over the 22 years since 1997? Will he also confirm that the Government have identified only one case in those 22 years which they believe to have been a breach of the joint declaration?

Hong Kong has become one of the world's most successful financial and business cities and a city in which many British people and businesses have prospered since 1997. Hong Kong is Asia's dominant equity market, and it has become the key conduit for Chinese inbound and outbound investment, including into the UK, so I urge the Government to continue to support and enhance the UK's economic links with Hong Kong. To that end, will the Minister confirm that high priority will be given to a free trade and investment agreement with Hong Kong as part of the UK's post-Brexit trade architecture? Will he confirm that work with Hong Kong under the UK's global financial partnerships strategy continues to be a priority?

It will be for the people and the Government of Hong Kong to resolve the very concerning current situation, but the UK can and should play its part in supporting the prosperity of Hong Kong as a great, open trading city.

3.58 pm

**Lord Luce (CB):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Sassoon, who has great business experience in Hong Kong and China. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on setting the scene for us so well. I recall that it was exactly five years ago this month, I think, that I led a similar debate on Hong Kong following the so-called umbrella demonstrations, which were not as serious as the demonstrations in the past four months.

As a cosignatory to the international treaty, we clearly have a duty and a responsibility to the people of Hong Kong to take an interest and to express our views constructively about their future.

My mind goes back to a weekend in 1984 when I was Minister of State with responsibility for Hong Kong. The Prime Minister asked me to be on duty throughout the weekend because Geoffrey Howe, as Foreign Secretary, was having vital discussions in Beijing with Chinese leaders, including Deng Xiaoping. I sat waiting for news, and late on that Saturday news came from the British ambassador. Deng Xiaoping, he said, had told him, "I trust Geoffrey Howe and therefore I have given an instruction that we will go ahead and draw up an agreement". Trust was at the heart of the issue and it is what started the whole process moving forward, to the extent that by the end of the year we had signed the joint declaration. It is one of the most remarkable declarations in the history of any country, with the juxtaposition of two totally different and contrasting systems of government: one an autocracy; the other with a relatively free way of life and rule of law.

At that time, and I believe that it applies just as strongly today, there was a mutual interest among all of us—the people of Hong Kong above all, the Chinese Government and the British Government—in seeing the successful implementation of that treaty and the Basic Law that went with it.

It seems that Hong Kong is facing one of the biggest challenges in its history. It has been through the 1967 cultural revolution, the 1984 anxieties about its future, the transition of the 1990s and the Umbrella Revolution, but this seems to go even deeper. Clearly, the young people are frustrated and worried about their future, their freedom, their jobs, their housing and the contrast between the wealthy and the less well-off. Alongside that, as we have already heard, China today under President Xi has stronger political and security control over the country. In Hong Kong itself, there has been a lack of political leadership by successive Chief Executives, and therefore a lack of confidence and trust.

What needs to be done? First, it would be sensible for Hong Kong to have a sharp look at the way it chooses its Chief Executives. The Basic Law allows the system to be devised in such a way that it is possible to elect a Chief Executive who is directly accountable to the people. However, if, as is the case at present, the means of appointing and electing a Chief Executive is through a body of 1,200 people who largely lean towards Beijing, with candidates who have to have Beijing's approval, there is bound to be a large element of mistrust. That, I believe, needs to be looked at.

[LORD LUCE]

Then there is the question of an independent inquiry into the police. I would hope that such an inquiry would restore confidence in them. For the young, there needs to be improvement in their housing and conditions and in their job opportunities. I hope that businesses in Hong Kong will help them in that respect.

On citizenship, I have only one point to make, not that we need to dwell on the broader issue. There is a group of 260 Hong Kong former servicemen who served in the Armed Forces under the British Crown and they are getting extremely nervous about their position and their security. This matter has been raised regularly in Parliament with the Home Secretary and I would be very grateful for the Minister's view on whether they can be given right of abode.

I believe that what is needed and what we should encourage—we cannot dictate; all we can do is persuade—is sustained dialogue in Hong Kong so that it can strengthen all that is embodied in the framing of the joint declaration and the Basic Law with imaginative leadership, and with us encouraging the international community to support it. That is the least we can do for the people of Hong Kong.

4.03 pm

**Lord Marlesford (Con):** My Lords, I refer the House to my entry in the register of interests. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on introducing this debate. He has long been a beacon of morality in your Lordships' House.

I first went to work in Hong Kong in 1961 and I have made numerous visits there over the last 58 years, most recently in May last year. In 1975, when I was a journalist, the *Economist* sent me to write a survey of Hong Kong, for which I had the most generous guidance from Sir Murray MacLehose. Sir Murray was Hong Kong's longest-serving, hugely respected and, in the view of many, greatest governor. He served four terms from 1971 to 1982; from 1982 he was, of course, a distinguished member of your Lordships' House.

I pay tribute also to my noble friend Lord Patten, whose governorship I was able to observe quite closely. Two parts of his legacy are especially relevant. First, during the run-up to the handover, he focused the eyes of the world on Hong Kong. Secondly, he taught the people of Hong Kong how to stand up for themselves.

I refer to Lord MacLehose because, together with Sir Philip Haddon-Cave, the financial secretary, he oversaw the development of Hong Kong from a trading outpost of the British Empire to a flourishing city state. He did so by advocating the interests of Hong Kong in London during the height of the British political struggle between socialism and capitalism. This aspect of the role of the British governor is, I believe, a clue to the cause of the tragic events over the last five months in Hong Kong.

Under the imaginative formula of “one country, two systems”, Hong Kong has for 20 years had a Chief Executive, selected—as the noble Lord, Lord Luce, explained—after some sort of consultation with Hong Kong, but really chosen by Beijing. Unfortunately, each Chief Executive has been perceived by Hong Kongers as representing the interests of Beijing in

Hong Kong rather than being an advocate for Hong Kong to the leadership in Beijing. Indeed, Carrie Lam seems to have tried to anticipate what would please Beijing. That seems to be how the disastrous extradition Bill was conceived. The obvious sensitivities should have excluded such a provocative initiative, especially as we gather that it was not initiated by Beijing. When the storm first burst, it should have been withdrawn immediately, instead of which matters have been allowed to drag on and, indeed, deteriorate for some months.

During this period, Beijing has actually been remarkably restrained, and rightly so, in its own interests. I have sympathy also with the Hong Kong police, although they have not behaved perfectly. The initial protests were wholly justified, but the escalation into violence was not. It has become counterproductive to the cause and concerns of the protesters, rather as the actions at Canning Town tube station last week have been for Extinction Rebellion.

Let us face the fact that the “one country, two systems” regime will continue for another 28 years and that this is not likely to mean full democracy for Hong Kong; certainly, it will not mean any form of independence. Beijing was fortunate to inherit the world's third most important financial centre. For China, that was indeed a treasure. While Shanghai is a world-class commercial centre, it is not under starter's orders as a global financial centre to replace Hong Kong. There are many reasons for this. Perhaps the most obvious is that the judiciary in China is under the control of the Communist Party and will remain so. The only challenge to Hong Kong's financial role comes from Singapore.

Mrs Lam should be allowed to retire. China's leadership—which means President Xi Jinping—should rise to the challenge of appointing a successor who can acquire and maintain the trust and respect of the people of Hong Kong, without forfeiting the confidence of Beijing.

4.09 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, I commend the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for giving the House the opportunity for this debate. Its depth is testimony to the continuing close ties between the UK and Hong Kong.

I was warned by a veteran staffer in the office of Caroline Lucas to beware of becoming involved in too many foreign affairs issues, because there are so many, and the human needs are so pressing, that they can quickly consume every hour of your day and more. So many tragedies around the world have a British link, for the disastrous history of British colonialism continues to play out in the current day, as well as the destructive and counterproductive policies of military adventurism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the issue of Hong Kong is one to which I have a personal tie. As a young journalist, I oversaw the *Bangkok Post's* coverage of the Hong Kong handover, now more than 22 years ago. What is more, the young people engaged in the struggle for democracy in Hong Kong have much in common with the climate strikers here in the UK, young people whose elders have failed them and who are now bravely taking the future into their own hands. Like many Members of this House, I

have been contacted by multiple individuals asking that Britain both acknowledge and act on the actions of the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities and the state of repression and fear in Hong Kong. I could not resist their calls.

In 1997, I thought that the British would stand up for the democratic rights of the people of Hong Kong. I remember being shocked by the final agreement. Earlier, the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson, talked about how the idea of handing over people is deeply disturbing and this really sums up what I thought at that time.

As a nation, we bear responsibility for the state of Hong Kong today, and that, as we have heard from so many noble Lords, is a frightening breakdown of the rule of law and abuses by officialdom of their power and resources. The Motion of the noble Lord, Lord Alton, calls on us to note the political unrest. I want to go much further than that. I want to condemn the clear human rights abuses and repression that are occurring and call for the British Government to take concrete action.

I will quote a few words from a woman who I will not name, for obvious reasons. She describes herself as an “ordinary working mother”, who is experiencing “the worst moment of my life”. This reflects the accounts mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith. This mother in Hong Kong speaks of living in a city where floating corpses, sometimes decapitated, are being found in the sea, and where there are alleged suicides in and around residential buildings, with police culpability widely thought to be involved. She speaks of a city where people are understandably feeling “hopeless”. Reference has been made to this week’s report from Stand with Hong Kong on the conditions of the San Uk Ling detention facility and the broader treatment of protesters by police. There are deeply disturbing reports of beatings, sexual violence against young women and the denial of medical treatment.

So what should we do? When I stand up in this House, I will aim always to not simply condemn, but ask for action. Surprisingly, we can look to the United States of America to see the kind of action that could be taken. The House of Representatives has passed, and the Senate is expected to pass, bills condemning China’s actions and supporting the right to protest in Hong Kong, and also requiring annual reviews of Hong Kong’s special economic and trade status. It is thought that the numbers exist to override any potential veto of those bills by Donald Trump. I hope that we can at least match this action in the UK. In Germany, the Foreign Minister met a visiting Hong Kong activist to hear his concerns. I hope that our Government would do likewise, should a request for a similar meeting be made. Of course, there is also the special issue that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, raised, about the holders of British national (overseas) passports. Britain cannot simply abandon these people.

The joint declaration on the question of Hong Kong agreed two decades ago contains no enforcement provisions, but this year the Government, in response to the Question from Caroline Lucas referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, said that they accepted that China had breached its obligations under the joint declaration, that this would,

“be a bilateral matter between us and China”,

and that the Government “would pursue it accordingly”. Given the widely reported state of Hong Kong today—the abusive behaviour of the police on the streets, the dreadful treatment of prisoners and the deaths linked to official action—I look forward to hearing from the Minister what action the Government plan to take.

4.14 pm

**Lord Wei (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for tabling this very timely debate. I refer to my registered interests, to my role as chair of the Hong Kong subgroup of the APPG on China, and to my being a British-born Chinese from Hong Kong.

The unrest in Hong Kong lately has been a cause of great concern to me personally and to those close to me. It is a beautiful place and its people possess a tremendous calling, not just to generate wealth and to be an entrepôt between mainland China and the rest of the world, but to be a source of people, ideas, and resources for the world. My ancestors left their village in Zhongshan, just across the border, after 23 generations via Hong Kong to join our global diaspora, like millions of others, by sea and air.

So it is especially heart-breaking to see the violence that has arisen on both sides of the divide in Hong Kong, in the streets and over the airwaves, as a city turns in on itself even as the world watches. This reflects a wider trend globally, where it seems that disagreement, fuelled by the internet as well as economic and political factors, is stretching our governance arrangements to the limit, whether in our own constitution, the situation in the US, in Northern Ireland, or indeed in Hong Kong with its “one country, two systems” model. It seems the hardest thing in the world right now is how to share power peacefully, whether you are being called to give some of it away or whether you want more of it. Evidently, the status quo everywhere needs to adapt. That is true even of the situation here in Westminster, but the question is always what we change the system into. As we well know, constitutional reform requires time to do well, and to listen to all parties and views. The unintended consequences of change can be severe further down the track.

However, to resort to violence seems to militate against carefully considered reform. All sides in the conflict in Hong Kong need to explore non-violent ways to move ahead and show restraint—I know that many do and they ought to be applauded—because the violence distracts from the real issues that need to be addressed around the world, whether around the rising cost of living, the creation of laws that infringe on individual freedom, especially of conscience or belief, intergenerational inequality and increasing monopolies of land, technology and talent. Doing nothing is not the answer to addressing these issues, nor, sadly enough, as we can see in the UK itself, is greater democracy in its current form necessarily a full-blown panacea to addressing the challenges we have here, which mirror those in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

The best way forward is for those who have the means and influence to help instigate change at the local level by bringing in responses based on truly listening to those who are protesting and the condition of the silent masses who sympathise with them. For

[LORD WEI]

example, how do we quickly build more affordable housing? I refer to the Bristol Housing Festival, which I am involved in, for a local UK response. How do we give our young people more hope, better jobs and opportunities, and empowerment in their lives generally? How do we curtail monopoly and monopsony domination of our markets?

Indeed, an era is coming soon when we will need to upgrade democracy itself. Our current model favours majorities over minorities and incumbents over new entrants, but in the age of the internet and social media a minority or new challenger that loses in our current democracy is no longer always content to let the matter rest. We need mechanisms to involve people and to get consent and buy-in at every level, not just at the headline majoritarian stage or in our formal legislatures. This is true in Northern Ireland, in Asia, in the US and around the world. Personally, I favour not just asking people who they like or what idea they like, which is expressed in our currently populist representative democracy and referenda model that we have inherited from over a century and decades ago, but asking directly what they think will work and allocating resources accordingly.

I have chosen so far not to engage with the top-line questions arising from this debate since I believe to focus on them is to miss the essential issue, which is how places such as Hong Kong can become better environments in which to live, in which their citizens feel they have a future and where no one is left behind or becomes so frustrated that they are tempted to rise up violently. Should we give all Hong Kong citizens full passports? That depends on whether doing so would help to increase the peace and address the future of Hong Kong, or risk antagonising an already tense and volatile situation.

Should the UK take a stronger stance with China on human rights abuses and back all pro-democracy protesters in the streets? The UK has been clear about its position on human rights, and has already made known its concerns about police conduct and rightly called for an inquiry. On the rule of law and the rising constraints on freedom in the region, the question is whether violent confrontation is the most effective way to address and convey these concerns, or whether there are other ways to help all our citizens have better lives.

I was encouraged, for example, when one of the developers in Hong Kong recently donated 3 million square feet of land to the Government to create affordable housing. It is a first practical step to change. While reform of governance is vital, the urgent way forward in many parts of the world is bringing immediate and long-term relief to workers and young people who have suffered a real-terms decline in wages over the last 20 years or more, compounded by rising housing and living costs. Only innovative and radical action by those who have the land, money and people resources can move the dial, working with protest groups as well as with government. It has happened in the past in our country, with Cadbury, Shaftesbury and Spedan Lewis, who founded the John Lewis model. Without them, we could well have suffered a bloody revolution here. We need similar Asian reformers now to step up and take their place in history.

4.20 pm

**Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Non-Aff):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton of Liverpool, whose ability to make this House have a conscience is enduring. I hope that he continues to do so.

My own relationship with Hong Kong began when, in 1976, I was taken on a tour of south-east Asia by my mother, the highlight of which was a week in Hong Kong. Nearly a decade later, the Hong Kong handover and the plight of Hong Kong citizens was the reason why, as a newly naturalised Briton, I instantly became a political activist, driven by Paddy Ashdown's passion for the rights of Hong Kong Chinese.

That support for Hong Kong's people also prompted me to go there and support the umbrella protests in 2014. The remarkable determination of a new generation of young people so clearly expressing their identity in the face of retreating rights was a revelation that enables me to understand what is happening there now.

First, although housing and jobs may be important, the movement now is about much more than economics: it is about identity and a political culture—and that is the Chinese Government's first miscalculation. The Chinese believe that their plans to build an economic powerhouse in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay area, which is intended to rival Silicon Valley, Tokyo and New York, will tie Hong Kongers into the Chinese dream—in other words, subsuming them into greater China. They hope that young people will be enticed by the trade-off they offer, whereby consumption is a proxy for freedom.

China's second miscalculation is to keep Mrs Lam in office. For all her attempts at resolving the situation, it is too little, too late, and her credibility—such as it was—is entirely shot. There has been a profound miscalculation on China's part, starting with the abduction of the staff of Causeway Bay Books—that China can act with impunity, prioritising its own interpretation of the Basic Law.

A further miscalculation is Beijing's increasing use of its powers to interpret the Basic Law, eroding the independence of Hong Kong judges. So, as the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in the other place has said, it is starting to be "one country, one-and-a-half systems". This loss of confidence in their constitution is surely fuelling the protesters' anger. Who would not fight for their future, when they have only to look at Xinjiang province to see what it means to be a minority in China? Apropos Mrs Lam, a wiser Government in Beijing would see that a more pragmatic person, given some slack from Beijing, may be better able to start the confidence-building exercise so necessary for a political resolution to these issues.

So, what is the UK's role in resolving this? I refer to the calls today for people of BNO status to be given indefinite leave to remain. But unilateralism, in my view, is not the answer to the UK's obligations. What is needed as an insurance policy is for a significant number of countries to act together to provide those assurances. In a case such as this, multilateralism is the only way to send—if we want—a message to China.

We are too diminished a power to be able to make a difference on our own, so I ask the Minister to assure

us that he is working with the European Union and the Commonwealth, as well as with the US, to advance the interests of Hong Kong's citizens.

However, it is a mistake to think that these brave young people necessarily want to move abroad. They are fighting for their future in their own land, not somewhere else. They wish to remain within their culture and their identity group, and, above all, not to let their fellow protesters down by pulling the ladder up and leaving them behind. The UK must do its best to provide such safety nets as it can, but above all, to marshal its resources for a co-ordinated and joint response with all other like-minded countries. It should convince its friends and partners that if a bully can run riot at home, he will run riot in his neighbourhood, and eventually, more widely. It is not a matter simply for the UK, but for the whole international community.

My final thought goes to the pivotal question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Patten of Barnes, the question that the students put to him about what will happen if China continues to tighten the screws. I think that the answer lies with China as well as with us. The regression of China's political trajectory is less than a decade old. Xi Jinping has been in power for only six years. While he has abolished term limits, he has not abolished longevity itself. He has not found the elixir of life yet. While 2047 is 28 years away, it is still a generation away. China may yet pivot away from its current trajectories. It is for us, and the rest of the international community, to ensure that it does so.

4.25 pm

**Lord Popat (Con):** My Lords, I too wish to pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for bringing this timely and necessary debate, and for his continued work championing human rights.

We heard today that Hong Kong is an amazing place, a global centre for trade that has thrived for decades. It is a mini-Britain, with its love of trade and commerce, its commitment to democracy, its relentless work ethic and the importance it places on education. The residents of Hong Kong should have no reason to be concerned. After all, the articles in the joint declaration agreed between Britain and China guarantee the people of Hong Kong their rights to economic and political independence for a period of 50 years following 1997. Yet that is not the case, and when you hear that the Chinese Foreign Ministry called the treaty merely,

“a historical document”,

that,

“no longer had any practical significance”,

it is no wonder that the people of Hong Kong are so distressed, and fear for their livelihoods.

My noble friend Lord Patten of Barnes said that the extradition Bill earlier this year was a tipping point, with millions of Hong Kong residents taking to the streets before it became too late. Many of those protesters have said that they consider themselves to be more British than Chinese. They have gathered outside the British consulate, singing “God Save the Queen”. These protesters want to escape the darkness of communism and bask in the light of democracy, and they are risking their lives to send us that message. We cannot and should not ignore them.

The making of modern China as a global power was done by copying Hong Kong's success on a wider scale, opening up its markets to the world. Over the past decade, Britain has built strong relations with China and has considerable good will in China, perhaps helped by our £60 billion trade deficit with it. My noble friend Lord Howell often says that the Commonwealth is our family, and that, I strongly believe, applies to the residents of Hong Kong. I am very much in agreement with those organisations and members of both Houses that have said that Britain and the Commonwealth should play a proactive role in protecting the residents of Hong Kong and offering them an alternative to remaining in their current homes, ideally giving them second citizenship. In 1997, Hong Kong residents could apply for British national overseas status, giving those residents the right to a UK passport but not the right to live or work in the UK.

I can hear the echoes of my own history in this predicament. We Ugandan Asians were British overseas citizen passport holders, which included a subset known as British-protected passport holders. When we were expelled by the brutal dictator Idi Amin, this status was our lifeline—our greatest gift.

The situation facing the residents of Hong Kong is very familiar to me. I am drawn to the steps taken by the then Prime Minister Edward Heath, in the face of considerable opposition to the Ugandan Asians. This country welcomed 28,000 Ugandan Asians; 19,000 stateless Ugandan Asians were welcomed by the Commonwealth countries, including Canada taking 5,000 and Australia taking 2,000. New Zealand took a few thousand, as did some parts of the then European Community. Heath ruled that Britain had a legal and moral responsibility to take in those with British passports, saying: “This is our duty. There can be no excuse. They are being expelled from a country which in many cases is the land of their birth. They are entitled to come here and they will be welcome here”. I strongly urge the Government to take inspiration from those words today and to ensure that, if the situation does not improve in Hong Kong, these residents will be guaranteed a home in either Britain or other Commonwealth countries.

There can be no excuse. These are British nationals and our family. They need our support and deserve our compassion. They are English-speaking, highly educated people who are entrepreneurs by nature. They would be a tremendous asset to Britain or any Commonwealth country. When the Ugandan Asians arrived in Britain, we were given the warmest of welcomes and have never wavered in our loyalty to Britain. I am convinced that the same situation will arise again if we open our homes and our hearts to the people of Hong Kong.

4.31 pm

**Lord Wilson of Tillyorn (CB):** My Lords, I come at the end of a long list of distinguished speakers. Two things are evident from that. In your Lordships' House there is great personal experience of Hong Kong—people who have lived there and people who have worked there. There is also a universal affection for Hong Kong and its people, and there is universally deep concern about what has been happening there over the past few weeks. That can surely be no surprise. There

[LORD WILSON OF TILLYORN]

were weeks of demonstrations, which started peacefully, with a majority of young people who were clearly well-intentioned and concerned about their own future. They were possibly not well informed about what they might reasonably achieve, but they had good intentions. There was then an increasing amount of violence. That is distressing to see, and not at all the way in which Hong Kong usually acts. It will be totally counterproductive and should not be tolerated.

There has been no occurrence of that degree of violence in Hong Kong that I can think of for some 50 years: in 1967, during the Cultural Revolution, there was serious violence. Then, the Hong Kong police behaved with great steadfastness. At the end of that year, so well had they behaved that they were given the accolade of being called the Royal Hong Kong Police.

There has been a good deal of criticism of the police recently, some of which your Lordships have shared. I noticed that my noble friend Lord Hogan-Howe could see how difficult it is to carry out such operations and probably how mistakes could be made. Such mistakes need to be remedied, but it is worth remembering not only that the police have been under enormous strain week after week, weekend after weekend, but that their families have also been threatened—their children going to school have been threatened—and their position has been extremely difficult.

I think it is clear enough that all of what has been going on is a consequence not just of the so-called extradition Bill, or the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, as it is properly called. That has been widely misunderstood. I think that a majority of those taking part in the demonstrations sincerely believed that they might be picked up for something that they had said about the Chinese leadership and sent to mainland China for trial. Of course, it was for extradition for alleged offences in mainland China, not picking up somebody who had allegedly done something in Hong Kong. The people who were, in a way, rightly concerned were business people going into China who feared that there might be some artificial accusation against them by rivals that would enable there to be a demand for them to be extradited to China. It was an ill-conceived measure; it was in the “too difficult” box, to put it mildly, and was not a sensible idea to put forward.

What it showed was that there was a great pile of dry timber in Hong Kong. The extradition Bill was the light that set that on fire, and it has remained on fire. Noble Lords have referred to a number of the concerns that young people have about housing, job opportunities and their freedoms, and simply what will happen to them in the future and whether they will lose some of the privileges that they have at the moment. Behind a lot of that has been a growing concern and worry about the extent of mainland China’s involvement in Hong Kong. It is not a simple issue. My impression is that what tends to happen is that, when there is a period of confusion in Hong Kong and uncertainty about what is happening, all sorts of different organisations in mainland China send their representatives into Hong Kong to find out what is happening—and to influence

what is happening, if they can. That begins to build up into a picture of much greater involvement in Hong Kong than should be the case.

At the time of the signing of the joint declaration, there was a strapline, or a slogan that was often put out from Peking: “gang ren zhi gang”, which I will translate as, “Hong Kong people running Hong Kong”. That seems to me to be an admirable objective. That was what it was said would be the future of Hong Kong after the implementation of the joint declaration and the transfer of sovereignty. But it needs the Hong Kong Government to be effective in what they are doing, the Hong Kong Legislative Council to be effective in backing up or questioning the Hong Kong Government, a mechanism for putting into effect laws and decisions, and for the Hong Kong people to show that they are capable of running Hong Kong. It is now more than 22 years since Hong Kong was returned to Chinese sovereignty. It is now a special part, a unique part—but a part nevertheless, as the noble Lord, Lord Howell, said—of the People’s Republic of China.

There have been a number of references made by noble Lords to the joint declaration. My impression, like that of the noble Lord, Lord Sassoon, is that the only clear-cut case of the breaking of the joint declaration has been the bookseller in Hong Kong, Lee Bo, who was, without doubt, taken out of Hong Kong without legal process; he was kidnapped and taken to China. It would be interesting if the Minister could say whether the British Government think that there have been other straightforward occasions of the breaking of the joint declaration.

It is worth saying that, although it is possible to say, as some Chinese officials have said, that the joint declaration is no longer applicable, that is only the case if you refer to the joint declaration as being just that bit that says that Britain will return to China sovereignty over Hong Kong. The vast bulk of the joint declaration is in its annexes, which lay down in terms the policies of the People’s Republic of China towards Hong Kong for 50 years. That is where what that means is written down precisely and in great detail. Those are Chinese policies laid down there. That remains applicable; it cannot not remain applicable.

I will revert, if I may, to our own role. Since we no longer administer—

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** I am sorry to intervene. I extended some generosity, in consultation with the Whips, to the other former Governor of Hong Kong. Would the noble Lord now wrap up? Although we are not tight on time, I want to be equal to both noble Lords.

**Lord Wilson of Tillyorn:** I am so sorry: I will wrap up. I just want to say that we cannot and should not try to tell the Hong Kong Government what to do, but we can hope for various things to happen. One would be a commission to look at the whole issue, which the noble Lord, Lord Patten, referred to. We share the position of being the only two survivors of an extinct species: Governors of Hong Kong. There are other things that could help to resolve the present situation. We must all hope that it will be resolved soon, for the good of Hong Kong and all the people who live there.

4.40 pm

**Baroness Northover (LD):** I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for securing this debate and for introducing it so powerfully. He is indeed a formidable champion of human rights worldwide and our conscience in the Lords, clearly. It has been a passionate and extremely well-informed debate. We are especially fortunate to have heard the contributions of the noble Lords, Lord Patten and Lord Wilson, with their different perspectives, maybe, on Hong Kong, as well as those of the noble Lord, Lord Luce, and of the noble Lord, Lord Wei, with his family background. We are also privileged, it seems to me, to be joined today by a number of young people who are quietly listening to our debate—I am not supposed to be referring to them, and I am not—and who I gather are from Hong Kong. We also have a former LegCo member here. Again, I am not referring to him, am I?

Like my noble friends Lord Chidgey and Lady Smith, I too have received a series of individual, very cogent emails from people in Hong Kong. I share the huge concern expressed today about Hong Kong. It is indeed a beautiful and dynamic place. I first visited in the mid-1980s, on my way to an academic conference in Japan which turned out to be much duller—it was on the slopes of Mount Fuji but not quite as exciting as my visit to Hong Kong. I was very much blown away by my visit and I still feel that excitement, even though the airport there is somewhat less terrifying than it used to be.

My last visit was a year ago, before the current protests, but you could see the challenges below the surface. In 1997, one-third of Chinese GDP was from Hong Kong; now, it is 3%, reflecting the growth of the mainland. That is a worrying statistic. It can be argued that this undervalues Hong Kong—the noble Lord, Lord Sassoon, has made that point to me—because of its position as a financial centre. Some 70% of RMB are traded in Hong Kong and three-quarters of foreign direct investment comes via Hong Kong. I hear what the noble Lord, Lord Sassoon, says about Hong Kong's current leading position.

Hong Kong has a rules-based system which is valued internationally, and that has been vital for Hong Kong, China and the world. My noble friend Lord Alderdice stated that businesses will leave, should leave and should be encouraged to leave if things do not improve. Clearly, the current position is unsustainable.

It was fascinating to hear the noble Lord, Lord Patten, on how challenging but imaginative was that Sino-British declaration. That declaration is a treaty lodged at the UN, yet this year, as other noble Lords have mentioned, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson described the handover treaty as,

“a historical document which no longer has any practical significance”.  
Is that spokesperson still in place? If so, what does this say about China's position?

The extradition treaty, which was the initial trigger, not the overall cause, of the protests, has now been fully withdrawn by Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, but the protests show little sign of letting up. Clashes and violence have escalated, as we have heard. Satellite photos show what appear to be armoured personnel carriers across the border in Shenzhen.

There are now reports that the Chinese Government are planning to replace Carrie Lam with an interim Chief Executive. Any such change must be accompanied by reform in Hong Kong, and not the opposite. There has still been no independent investigation into police violence, despite the UK Government apparently urging this. Does the Minister accept that the UK Government should now suspend all export licences for crowd control equipment to Hong Kong?

The noble Lord, Lord Hogan-Howe, mentioned the police. In response to a Written Question from my colleague in the other place, Alistair Carmichael, the Government said that we are providing training to the police force in Hong Kong. If that is still the case, what steps are being taken to ensure that this training includes the need to uphold human rights and freedom of expression?

Now we have the Chief Executive using emergency powers—many noble Lords have made reference to this. The ban on face masks is a serious breach of freedom of assembly and the right to protest, as others have said. Does the Minister agree that the use of emergency powers is a clear breach of the declaration? The EU issued a *démarche* a few months ago because there was a risk to EU nationals from the extradition treaty. Will the UK encourage the EU to issue a second *démarche* on the Chief Executive's new powers? What are we doing to work with our EU allies?

The events of recent months, alongside the Chinese Government's claims that the joint declaration is no longer a valid document, pose a serious challenge. The noble Lord, Lord Luce, spoke of how vital trust was and is. Lord Ashdown led a campaign 20 years ago to give the people of Hong Kong British citizenship, including the right to abode, if China ever reneged on its promises. Does the Minister not think we have reached that point?

The concerns of those in Hong Kong are informed by the human rights abuses known to have taken place on the mainland. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, has mentioned a number of these: the lack of freedom of expression; Tiananmen Square; what has happened to certain booksellers. Most recently, we have had the report from the China Tribunal on forced organ harvesting in China. The chair of that tribunal, Sir Geoffrey Nice, is present here today. The tribunal on organ harvesting concluded that the,

“Commission of Crimes Against Humanity against the Falun Gong and Uyghurs has been proved beyond reasonable doubt”.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Finlay and Lady Grey-Thompson, laid out the tribunal's appalling conclusions. Can the Minister say whether he has personally read the China Tribunal's report? If he has not, will he go away and do so? This issue will not go away. If he has, can he say what action the UK Government will take on the matter, particularly as he is Human Rights Minister?

China has made astonishing progress over the last few decades, pulling people out of poverty and engaging on the world stage. It is producing extraordinarily able students who are studying around the world, including in this country—including at the clearly wonderful university over which the noble Lord, Lord Patten, presides. China is the superpower of the 21st century,

[BARONESS NORTHOVER]

but with that power should come responsibility. In what may seem the microcosm of Hong Kong, how China wields that power may become apparent. We know that China has responded to criticism of engagement in Latin America and Africa. It is vital for all of us that we engage globally when so many other pressures seem to be on us to turn inwards and put up barriers. What China does in Hong Kong matters. What the UK, as it contemplates Brexit, does in this circumstance matters. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

4.48 pm

**Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab):** Like many noble Lords before me, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for securing this debate. It follows on from a number of Oral Questions and Private Notice Questions that have been debated in this House over the past few months.

The relationship between the people of the UK and the people of Hong Kong is built not only on the foundations of our history but on shared principles. As I understand it, with 170,000 British passport holders currently living or working in Hong Kong, and up to 100,000 Hong Kong nationals in the UK, we remain very much interconnected today. For those reasons and others, it came as no surprise that this House has taken such a great interest in recent events. Having listened to noble Lords in today's debate, it is clear that the insight this House offers on Hong Kong is likely to be unparalleled. I hope that both the Hong Kong and Chinese Governments are listening to this debate and to many of the issues and concerns that have been raised.

As we near close to five months of widespread political unrest in Hong Kong, the situation seems to escalate almost with each passing week. Earlier this month, we heard the shocking news that live ammunition had been used against protesters. Although I have not been made aware of any recurrences, there have been repeated reports of beatings of peaceful protesters, aid personnel and journalists, as well as attacks with batons and the misuse of non-lethal weapons. Indeed, only last week, the police responded to protesters with an onslaught of rubber bullets, tear gas and baton charges. As the weekend comes upon us, I worry about what could result from any further clashes between the protesters and the police. Therefore, in the immediate term, I hope that the Minister can assure the House that he is urging restraint by the Hong Kong authorities, and will be taking all necessary steps to persuade them to show such restraint and end this violent escalation.

On human rights, I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm whether the Government are exploring any options to urge the authorities to respect freedom of assembly. This principle and other rights are enshrined by international conventions and law, and there can be no excuse for any infringements. Of course, as the noble Lord, Lord Patten, said earlier, we all condemn any protesters who have turned to violence, especially during the events of last weekend, when a small number crossed that line and turned to violence, with a few targeting businesses that had been deemed pro-Beijing.

But at their core the protesters have been peaceful, and the cause that ignited the unrest ultimately remains unresolved.

When the Foreign Secretary was asked in the other place about an independent inquiry he responded:

"The Administration in Hong Kong have not gone the full way we would like them to, but they have taken steps to reform and reinforce the independence of the police complaints council".— [Official Report, Commons, 26/9/19; col. 866.]

As that was in September, can the Minister update us on whether there have been any advances or any further pressure put on the Hong Kong Government for an independent inquiry?

Although the proposed amendments to allow the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to extradite individuals to mainland China to face trial has been withdrawn, there is still immense frustration at their initial introduction and the manner in which the authorities proceeded with them. The noble Lord, Lord Wilson, is correct about the intent of the original extradition laws, and in his analysis that they were "ill-conceived measures". However, rightly or wrongly, there was fear that those changes could be the thin end of a wedge or could lead, if changed in the future, to individuals in Hong Kong who had criticised the Chinese Government, either on social media or in other ways, being extradited to the mainland. As we heard, the judicial system in mainland China records a conviction rate of more than 99%. A lack of trust has clearly led to these issues.

We also cannot separate the issue of the Sino-British joint declaration and its associated democratic foundations, set out so well in 1984. In recent years, China has steadily eroded and undermined the joint declaration. There have been increasing restrictions on electoral rights and crackdowns on dissent, with pro-democracy candidates being disqualified and the Hong Kong National Party being banned by the Government in September last year.

We must remember that the people are protesting in the streets of Hong Kong simply for their judicial independence, human rights and democratic freedoms. Those are three principles that the 1984 agreement was designed to protect. As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, said in his introduction, we have a moral and legal obligation to the people of Hong Kong. Despite the UK's responsibility to stand up for the declaration, the Government have remained not quite silent, but too quiet. It would be good to hear the Prime Minister speak up and stand firm in defence of the declaration. I ask the Minister to encourage the Prime Minister to do just that.

I am sure that, like me, many other noble Lords participating in today's debate received emails from Hong Kongers. If the situation worsens in Hong Kong, I wonder whether we will be able to hear from those individuals in future. Will it be possible for them to email Members of this Parliament to outline their concerns and their plight, and will they feel comfortable doing so?

In conclusion, as all noble Lords have said, it is in the interests of both the people of Hong Kong and the authorities for a resolution to be found. The groundwork for such resolution can be found only if the authorities

immediately practise restraint and respect for the primacy of the Hong Kongers' human rights. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will now use their role on the global stage and our unique relationship to urge the authorities of both Hong Kong and China to do so.

4.57 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, first, I join all noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for tabling this important debate. Many words have been used about him, and rightly so. I stand before you as perhaps the person most greatly challenged, at least from a parliamentary perspective, by the tenacity, but also great strength and expertise, that he brings to debates on human rights generally. I am sure that he also knows that I respect his insights and very much welcome the expertise, direction and advice that he gives, and I am very grateful for his contribution to this important debate.

I start by aligning myself with the words of my noble friend Lord Sassoon. I am sure I speak for all noble Lords when I say that we stand together in remembrance of and prayer for the 39 nationals who have been reported to have died in the incident in the lorry. We are all equally appalled by that tragic incident, and I express condolences to all the families of those victims on behalf of your Lordships' House.

This was the first opportunity for me to hear from one of our newer Members, the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett. I listened carefully to the advice she was given about how foreign affairs can be all consuming. When you are the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs you do not have much choice in the matter, and I am sure she will agree that when we hold debates of this quality we are provided with great insight and expertise on the important matters confronting the Government and our country, as well as into the role played by Her Majesty's Government on the world stage. I welcome her contribution.

As observed by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, I am sure that all noble Lords will join me in singling out the contributions of my noble friend Lord Patten and the noble Lord, Lord Wilson of Tillyorn. They brought their experience, insight and expertise to bear, and the value they brought to the debate because of their service in Hong Kong is well worth noting. I listened carefully to their contributions, particularly on how we should move forward in what is now clearly a very challenging situation in Hong Kong. I thank them both and acknowledge the indulgence of noble Lords; it was right that they were both given an extended time to speak, and I am particularly grateful to my noble friend Lady Berridge for ensuring that that was done in a seamless fashion.

Hong Kong has been a subject of long-standing interest in your Lordships' House, and rightly so. Concerns were raised in the debate about the ongoing situation, as they have been in the other place. They have also been expressed in correspondence that Members of both the other place and this House have received. Among other noble Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, pointed out that many people will be listening intently to this debate.

The Government share the concerns of the noble Lord, Lord Alton, and indeed of all noble Lords, about the situation, in particular the violent clashes between protestors and the police. The noble Lord, Lord McNicol, asked whether the Government are taking steps to raise the issue. I hope that he will be reassured by some of my responses, which will show that we are doing just that.

My noble friend Lord Marlesford rightly described Hong Kong as being once upon a time a real flourishing city. No doubt we will reflect on those times and ask that, with hope and ambition, it will again be the case in the not too distant future. I agree with my noble friends Lord Carrington and Lady Hooper, who both drew attention to the importance of peaceful and lawful protest while recognising that anyone who resorts to violent action should rightly be condemned. It is right that the majority of Hong Kong citizens have exercised over many months their right to protest and that they have done so through peaceful and lawful means. That needs to be recognised. Equally, I am sure that I speak for all noble Lords in saying that we must condemn the hardcore minority of protestors who at times insist on using violence. As the noble Lord, Lord Wilson, reminded us, the police have shown restraint in many instances when there have been direct attacks on them. We have seen the use of petrol bombs, while recently a police officer was slashed with a knife. This violence, as my noble friend Lord Carrington rightly said, must stop.

**Lord Patten of Barnes:** My Lords, perhaps I may intervene briefly to make one point to my noble friend. Criticisms have been made of the policing in Hong Kong, but the real problem is that public order policing has been regarded by the Government as a substitute for politics. Tear gas is not a substitute for talking to people and trying to deal with their real grievances. That has put the police and their families in a very difficult position.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** I concur with my noble friend, who is of course right. That is why the ultimate solution to the challenge is political dialogue, which I will talk about in a moment or two.

The noble Baroness, Lady Northover, asked some specific questions about the situation on the ground as regards the use of emergency powers, which I would like to deal with at the outset. While of course Governments need to ensure people's security and safety, as my noble friend has just reminded us, they must avoid aggravating situations and instead seek to reduce tensions. She also asked whether the introduction of emergency regulations is a breach of the joint declaration. Our assessment thus far is that they do not breach it. Again, Governments need to ensure that the security and safety of their citizens remains paramount. She also asked about crowd control equipment for Hong Kong. As my right honourable friend the then Foreign Secretary stated in the House of Commons on 25 June,

"we will not issue any further export licences for crowd control equipment to Hong Kong unless we are satisfied that concerns raised about human rights and fundamental freedoms have been thoroughly addressed".—[*Official Report*, Commons, 25/6/19; col. 551.]

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

The noble Baroness also raised police training. As she will be aware, an additional risk-management process is used with police training for all security and justice programmes to assess and mitigate human rights risks. The aim of the training we have provided to Hong Kong is to improve a foreign authority's ability to deploy human rights-compliant, modern policing techniques. It is a fine balance, but we are keeping that situation under review.

The noble Lord, Lord Wilson, talked of the breach of the joint declaration, as did my noble friend Lord Sassoon. Both rightly pointed out the importance of one state, two systems continuing and continuing well. Her Majesty's Government have not to date assessed that China has explicitly breached the joint declaration, with the exception of one well-documented case.

The police response was raised by several noble Lords. We had an expert contribution from the noble Lord, Lord Hogan-Howe, who asked about reports of sexual assault by the Hong Kong police. This was also a concern expressed by the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett. I am aware of these reports, and we remain extremely concerned by reports of violence by the police. We also note that the Hong Kong police have announced that they are investigating a recent allegation from a university student, and that the student has said she is seeking legal advice. We will continue to monitor that situation. We have always sustained the position that the police response must be proportionate. We are seriously concerned by the instances of apparent mistreatment of protesters by the police. Of course, I note the words of my noble friend Lord Patten in this respect.

My noble friends Lord Patten and Lord Howell, the noble Lords, Lord Hogan-Howe and Lord Luce, and several other noble Lords all raised a police inquiry. We maintain that there must be a robust, credible and independent investigation into these incidents. Such an inquiry would be an important step towards healing divisions and rebuilding trust. The noble Lord, Lord McNicol, asked whether we are continuing to raise this bilaterally with the Chinese authorities. The short answer is that yes, we are.

As I have said, Her Majesty's Government believe that political dialogue—as several noble Lords have expressed—is the only way to achieve a peaceful resolution to this situation. While we have welcomed the Chief Executive's initial steps towards dialogue, it is clear that further clarity is required and that further steps need to be taken for the Chief Executive and her team to reach across communities and directly address the people's concerns. Crucially, if the process is to succeed, it is incumbent on all to be involved and engaged in good faith.

I agree with my noble friend Lord Sassoon's views on the importance of the strength and stability that the one country, two systems framework has provided to Hong Kong over the past 22 years. Hong Kong is already a valuable trading partner for the UK, and the UK for Hong Kong. We look forward to seeing this trading relationship develop post Brexit. Similarly, we enjoy deep and close co-operation with Hong Kong as a leading financial centre, which I hope and expect we can build on in the months and years to come.

We have rightly heard about concerns and the need to uphold rights and freedoms. This was a point made by the noble Lords, Lord Carrington and Lord Alton, and others. I was particularly taken by the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, who talked about businesses working in Hong Kong. As someone who spent 20 years in the City of London and dealt regularly with Hong Kong, I know the city well. Those ties are important. However, as a co-signatory to the Sino-British joint declaration, the UK is committed to promoting and upholding the rights, freedoms and autonomies enshrined in it. I assure the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, that we have worked intensively in recent weeks and months to support a positive resolution. Those factors will be sustained and will continue to be part of our dialogue in this respect.

Several noble Lords raised the Prime Minister's direct engagement on this issue—the noble Lord, Lord McNicol, mentioned it specifically—and they will recall that the Prime Minister raised Hong Kong at the G7 meeting in August, where G7 leaders reaffirmed the importance of the joint declaration and called for an end to violence. This also addresses in part the issue raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith. Furthermore, my right honourable friend the Prime Minister also wrote to President Xi on 30 September and underlined the importance of upholding the joint declaration under the one country, two systems framework.

My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has also set out our concerns directly in his engagement with the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, and the Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor, Wang Yi. Regrettably, he was unable to meet Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the UN General Assembly as planned because he needed to return to London. However, following this, the Foreign Secretary wrote to him on 30 September and we continue to have regular exchanges with both the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities.

On the issue of our European partners, raised by my noble friend Lady Hooper and the noble Baroness, Lady Falkner, as I said, we meet with G7 partners on a regular basis. We also raised Hong Kong at the Human Rights Council in September and at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in October, where the UK underlined the importance of upholding the right to peaceful assembly.

Issues were raised around aspects of human rights—an area close to my heart, as noble Lords will know—and it is important that we address them. We continue to do so at ambassadorial level and the most recent meeting with the Chinese ambassador in London was earlier this week. We have also regularly raised the issue with the leadership in China and Hong Kong, who remain in no doubt about our concerns over the current situation.

On the Commonwealth, our recent exchanges on Hong Kong—including those by my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary—have included some with Australian Foreign Minister Payne and European counterparts. At the United Nations, for which I am the Minister responsible, we raised Hong Kong in our national statement to the September session of the Human Rights Council, and last week we underlined

the importance of upholding the right to peaceful assembly in a national statement to the UN General Assembly.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Finlay and Lady Grey-Thompson, raised the issue of the Falun Gong and its practitioners. The noble Baroness, Lady Northover asked me specifically about the tribunal and I note the presence in the Gallery of Sir Geoffrey Nice. I had occasion to meet him recently to discuss this issue and I can assure all noble Lords that we are aware of the findings. A final report is still due but we are watching this space carefully. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, specifically has had various exchanges on this issue. It is not lost on us; it is an important priority and I assure noble Lords that I will continue, as Human Rights Minister, to keep an eye on this issue.

On the wider issue of religious freedoms in China, again raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Finlay, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Salisbury and the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, among others, I can assure all noble Lords that this remains a priority for both Her Majesty's Government and for me as Minister for Human Rights. We have not held back. We have regularly raised the issue of human rights and religious freedoms in our expressions, statements and formal contributions, particularly at the Human Rights Council. I recognise the immense work that has gone on to address concerns around Falun Gong in particular. Equally, we remain deeply concerned—and have raised these concerns—about the persecution of Christians, the Uighur Muslims and other minorities within China and we will continue to do so.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, asked about the sanctions regime. The noble Lord will recall that we have passed legislation on this and we are seeking to bring forward the statutory instruments. That will provide the UK with an autonomous global human rights sanctions regime after we have left the European Union and will also allow us to respond to serious human rights violations.

I am conscious of time, so I want to move on to the right of abode. This was rightly raised by several noble Lords, including my noble friend Lord Popat, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and the noble Lord, Lord Alton. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, asked me about numbers. There are currently 248,000 holders of BNO, but there are 2.73 million people who are eligible for it. I note the points raised by all noble Lords in this respect, and I emphasise this Government's commitment to and support for British nationals overseas, who are known as the BNOs. As my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary set out in the other place on 26 September, the status of BNOs was part of the delicate balance in the negotiations that led to the Sino-British joint declaration. The joint declaration is crucial to the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and the rights, freedoms and autonomy of its people. I would add that this only applies effectively for both sides to respect what is within the agreement.

I assure the right reverend Prelate and other noble Lords that we believe that the best outcome for the BNOs is the high degree of autonomy, rights and freedoms set out specifically in the joint declaration.

The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, raised this, as did other noble Lords, including my noble friends Lord Howell and Lord Marlesford, and the noble Lord, Lord Luce. My noble friend Lord Wei, who provided a particular insight from his Hong Kong background, talked of reforms within Hong Kong.

I think that we are all clear that the way forward must be, first, constructive and meaningful dialogue with all communities, as my noble friend Lord Patten said. Bridges must be built to address their concerns directly. Our long-standing view is that transition to universal suffrage for the elections for the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council, as provided by Hong Kong Basic Law, would be the best way to guarantee Hong Kong's stability and prosperity in the long run and would be in everyone's interests.

We take the issue of the BNOs very seriously. The Foreign Secretary and his ministerial counterparts are listening to the concerns that are being expressed. The Government are not immune to receiving representations. We have received them directly and we will consider the best way forward to continue to support and strengthen our work with the BNO community. The Government have given careful consideration to the letter from the noble Lord, Lord Alton, dated 9 September and signed by 176 noble Lords and other parliamentary colleagues. I welcome the broad spectrum of support for Hong Kong and its people and note the points that have been raised.

With regard to Commonwealth countries, it is not in my remit to talk about the immigration policy of other Commonwealth countries, but I reiterate my view that the best way for any like-minded countries to support BNOs is to defend the joint declaration, which they are doing. We have received strong support for that, including in discussions we have had with other Commonwealth partners, most notably recently with Australia.

The noble Lord, Lord Luce, mentioned Hong Kong servicemen and a number of noble Lords raised the status of former members of the Hong Kong Military Service Corps. I assure the noble Lord that the Home Secretary is listening very carefully to the representations that have been made on behalf of former Hong Kong Military Service Corps personnel who were unable to obtain citizenship through the selection scheme.

The noble Lord, Lord Pendry, raised the issue of Hong Kong students who are studying in the UK. My short answer is that it is unacceptable for anyone to be intimidated by any bullying. Universities have a duty of care to protect all students. If there are particular instances, I urge the noble Lord to make the Government aware of them.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, asked about unexplained suicides. This is a very sensitive situation and I am aware of it. We have had one formal request from one family, and we urge people not to speculate on the reasons behind the issue. The circumstances are obviously very tragic for the family. If there are further details on this, I will share them with the noble Baroness.

Finally, the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson, and my noble friend Lord Popat talked about the Chinese view of the joint

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]  
 declaration, describing it as a “historic document”. The short answer from Her Majesty’s Government is that it is absolutely not. It is a legally binding treaty, registered at the UN, and it remains in force. As a co-signatory we have the absolute right to speak out when we have concerns about its implementation. I assure noble Lords that we will continue to make this point consistently in public, bilaterally and in private to the Chinese Government.

Once again, I thank all noble Lords for their insightful and expert contributions to this very comprehensive debate. I am sure that questions will be asked of me and I will continue to update noble Lords as and when we have further updates to provide. Ultimately, I am sure that we are all committed to encouraging all the parties that are directly concerned—the Hong Kong Administration, the Chinese Government and all international partners—to do all they can to realise and uphold the peaceful vision of a thriving Hong Kong and a thriving China under the “one country, two systems” model.

5.20 pm

**Lord Alton of Liverpool:** My Lords, the entire House will be grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister of State, for the thorough way in which he has just answered the issues that that have been raised and for his promise to come back and keep us briefed on developments as they occur.

The noble Lord, echoing the noble Lord, Lord Sassoon, reminded us of the tragic news that the 39 people who have been found dead in a lorry were of Chinese origin. We do not yet know their story, but we do know that they shared our humanity. Shared humanity has been a theme that has informed every contribution in today’s debate.

Many noble Lords referred to moving correspondence from Hong Kong. This morning, I received an email from a lady who said, “I don’t know if you will really read my email, but please try to do something so people know the pain we are suffering in Hong Kong”. I think that our speeches today, from every part of your

Lordships’ House, have demonstrated that we have listened and that we have heard, and we have tried to articulate some of that pain.

In a range of knowledgeable and measured speeches, we have heard considerable support for finding an international approach to providing an insurance policy of second citizenship and a second right of abode. We have heard universal support for “one country, two systems”, yet we have also heard how that has been emasculated. Yesterday, I met Alan Leong, a barrister and one of the leaders of a Hong Kong political party, who set out a number of examples of where he believes that the 1984 agreement has indeed been breached.

We have spoken with depth, knowledge, passion and commitment. All of us have said that the best way forward—a point that the noble Lord, Lord Patten, made so well—is to try to find a way ahead that does not involve violence but ensures that constructive solutions and political answers are found, as were found in 1984 in what all of us have referred to as an act of diplomatic genius, to paraphrase something that the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, said earlier.

I hope that the lady who wondered whether her email would be read or whether we have understood the pain of Hong Kong will have heard our debate today and that, like the young people whom we are not supposed to mention—although the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, quite rightly did—and who have packed our Galleries, she will know that they and their concerns have not been forgotten. It is a signal from a great and free Parliament that we will not forget our historic, moral and legal responsibilities. This Parliament will not be silenced in its responsibilities to safeguard “one country, two systems”, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, free speech and autonomy.

I end by saying that we must always replace fear with hope and indifference with solidarity and never neglect our common humanity. It only remains for me, once again, to thank all noble Lords who have spoken so eloquently today.

*Motion agreed.*

*House adjourned at 5.23 pm.*