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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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House of Lords

Thursday 1 December 2022

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Gloucester.

Introduction: Baroness Bray of Coln

11.07 am

Angela Lavinia Bray, having been created Baroness Bray of Coln, of Coln St Aldwyns in the County of Gloucestershire, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Maude of Horsham and Baroness Finn, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Introduction: Lord Weir of Ballyholme

11.12 am

Peter James Weir, having been created Baron Weir of Ballyholme, of Ballyholme in the County of Down, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Lord Morrow and Lord Dodds of Duncairn, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Oaths and Affirmations

11.16 am

Lord Davies of Oldham made the solemn affirmation, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

Question

11.17 am

Asked by **Baroness Gale**

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to remove the reservation on Article 59 of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, now that they have ratified the convention.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con): My Lords, the Government are committed to tackling violence against women and girls. We were therefore delighted to ratify the Istanbul convention in July and it came into force in the UK on 1 November. We are carefully considering the findings of the Support for Migrant Victims scheme pilot evaluation to ensure that migrant victims are supported effectively. We remain committed to making a timely decision on whether it is appropriate to maintain our reservation on Article 59 of the convention.

Baroness Gale (Lab): I have to say that I expected that Answer from the Minister but I thank him anyway. Is he aware that Southall Black Sisters, which was running the pilot scheme, has said that the scheme has a different focus on Article 59 and therefore should not be used to justify the reservation? Will he agree to meet representatives from SBS so that they can explain why they do not believe there is a need to wait for the pilot scheme report before the Government remove the reservation on Article 59?

As we are half way through the 16 days of action by White Ribbon, which campaigns against violence against women and girls, does the Minister also agree that this would be a wonderful opportunity for the Government to show their support for migrant women who suffer from domestic abuse while the perpetrators hold over them the threat that, if they leave, they will lose their status in this country? Will the Minister commit to that today?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, as I said, the Government are considering the report received from the organisations, including Southall Black Sisters, that operated the pilot scheme, and will respond in due course. I think that is as far as I can go at the moment.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): In a statement to the *Guardian* in May, when asked why the Government had excluded Article 59 from ratification, a government spokesperson said that

“we are evaluating our approach to supporting migrant victims of domestic abuse and will make a final decision ... once that is concluded.”

Have the Government also evaluated how many victims are enduring abuse at home, fearful of seeking help because the threat of deportation is being held over them by their abuser? Is their suffering being factored into the Government's evaluation?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I should make it clear that the Government regard the victims first and foremost as victims, so of course those considerations are being taken. We are far from alone in making reservations; 25 other countries have also done so on ratification or indicated their intention to do so when signing. As I have said, we will be considering that decision in the light of the migrant victims scheme pilot evaluation, which is being looked at.

Baroness Sugg (Con): My Lords, I am pleased to hear that the Government are reconsidering the reservation. Is the Minister able to give any more clarity on a timeline for that reconsideration?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I thank my noble friend for that. We have also carefully considered the recommendations in the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's *Safety Before Status* report, and the follow-up report is due to be published before the end of this year. Under the terms of the Domestic Abuse Act, we have 56 days to respond to that, so the extension of the MVS pilot covers that 56 days and we will be responding within that timeframe.

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester: My Lords, do the Government plan to include the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's definition of immigration abuse in policy and guidance on domestic abuse?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the Government have already taken forward a number of the recommendations made in part 1 of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's *Safety Before Status* report. As I say, the follow-up report is due to be published soon. We have partially accepted 11 recommendations. I am happy to say that all those things will be considered in due course.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, I think the Minister will now realise that across the House there is concern because—it is important for him to acknowledge this—being safe and protected from inhuman and degrading treatment is a human right. How are the Government compliant with that obligation if the reservation on Article 59 is in place, denying access to domestic abuse support to thousands of women victims merely because of their immigration status?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I have obviously heard the tone of the House but, as I have tried to make clear, the Government are carefully considering this and will look into being able, as we hope, to withdraw the reservation in due course. It is fair and right, however, that we evaluate the reports received so far and the ones that we will be receiving shortly.

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, the Government also entered into a reservation in respect of forced abortion and sterilisation. Can my noble friend the Minister explain why?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): Yes, that is under Article 44. We did not consider that there was a strong case to make an exception for forced abortion or forced sterilisation. Those offences are covered by general offences of physical violence, for example ABH and GBH. We do not apply dual criminality to those offences when they are committed in normal physical violence contexts, as we know of no jurisdiction which does not have general offences of violence equivalent to ours. There is therefore no reason to take a different approach when it comes to forced abortion and forced sterilisation.

Lord Bird (CB): Will the Minister reassure us that the Government are going to do something about those people caught by this lack of justice while they are making up their mind? Will they be able to look back at all those people who will, while they are making up their mind, be destroyed by the gross misuse of them as human beings?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I referred earlier to the pilot scheme being extended for a year, so I would hope that nobody will fall into the category described by the noble Lord.

Baroness Bryan of Partick (Lab): Can the Minister understand why some women in this position who are concerned about their immigration status are reluctant to involve the police force, not just because of that status but because of their colour and gender?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): Yes, the Government absolutely understand that. I reiterate the point that they are regarded as victims first and foremost. Essentially, the question is: why is there a firewall between police and immigration enforcement? Having considered the evidence from experts in the sector and police representatives, we did not consider that establishing a complete or time-limited data-sharing firewall between the police and the Home Office would meet the joint aims of encouraging victims of crime with insecure status to report crime while maintaining an effective immigration control.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, the Minister said that he was delighted that the Government had ratified this convention. I share his delight, notwithstanding the reservation, but can he tell the House why it took so long?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I can tell the House that if we had not introduced the reservation, it would have taken even longer. As to why it took so long, no, I do not know the answer.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, I appreciate that the Minister has said that the Government are considering removing the reservation, but can he explain a little about what the problem is? He will know, of course, that Article 59 does not give blanket residence to any class of women. It just says that a competent authority should consider their circumstances and, where necessary, give this vital protection to them.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): Again, as I think I have explained, the Government are assessing the evidence that is coming back from the migrant victims scheme pilot programme.

Lord Green of Deddington (CB): My Lords, can the Minister elaborate on the immigration aspects of this problem?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I am not entirely sure how to answer that question. With regard to the firewall, I have just given a very complete answer. I hope that goes some way to answering the noble Lord's question.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): As the Minister was not able to answer my question, could he write to me with an answer?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I will endeavour to do so, yes.

Sri Lanka: Truth Commission Question

11.26 am

Asked by *Lord Moylan*

To ask His Majesty's Government what direct assistance they will offer to the reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka and the establishment of the truth commission in that country.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, the UK Government stand alongside our partners and have worked in the Human Rights Council core group on Sri Lanka, which has led to international efforts over many years to promote accountability, reconciliation and human rights in Sri Lanka, including, most recently, implementing UN Human Rights Council Resolution 51/1. The resolution renewed the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on Sri Lanka, and to protect and preserve evidence of past human rights abuses to use in future accountability processes.

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, going beyond my noble friend's Answer and given that next year is the 75th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, and therefore its long partnership with Great Britain as a member of the Commonwealth, is he able to say whether His Majesty's Government will consider working with Sri Lanka to invest in a large, landmark development scheme for the country that would help to add resilience in the future against the economic shocks of the sort that we have seen it suffer recently?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, notwithstanding the continuing prioritisation we are giving to human rights, which have to remain part of the discussion to ensure that the issues arising from the previous civil war are not forgotten, including the targeting of particular communities, I assure my noble friend that we remain resolute in what we are doing at the HRC. But I take on board the specific element of the economic empowerment of communities as a way to build a country. Earlier this year, as the then Minister responsible for our relations with Sri Lanka, I met President Wickremesinghe. I have also recently met Foreign Minister Ali Sabry. Our focus has also been on the current IMF package and how it should act as a lever to ensure economic prosperity for communities across Sri Lanka.

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, following on from the tail-end of the Minister's remarks, does he agree that one of the best ways to assist Sri Lanka in these challenging times is to speak up for the country where opportunity exists, and that partnering would be a win-win situation, geo-economically and geo-strategically?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, in part I have already addressed that issue, but I agree with the noble Viscount that the economic prosperity of a country is an enabler to allow that country to

move forward. At the same time, we remain very focused on ensuring that the important elements of reconciliation and justice also prevail.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, earlier this year the Minister assured the House that we were responding to the humanitarian crisis that occurred. I welcomed the Government's efforts, but in November the UN team in Sri Lanka revised and extended its humanitarian needs and priorities plan, which included a call for additional funding to address nutrition and provide clean drinking water. Can the Minister tell us what steps we are taking to support that plan, including ensuring that other allies do likewise?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord is right, and we have of course worked very closely on the humanitarian situation. In advance of the Summer Recess, I met his colleague, the honourable Catherine West, who is the Shadow Minister for Asia, to share with her the details of our humanitarian support—£3 million was specifically allocated. The noble Lord rightly raises the UN assessments and, as he will know, we are working very closely with UN agencies, not just OCHA but others, to ensure that issues of nutrition and medical support are addressed, particularly with other key agencies, such as UNICEF, with a focus on women and children.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords—

Lord Haselhurst (Con): My Lords—

Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con): My Lords, it is the turn of the Liberal Democrats.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, bad governance, conflict and human rights abuses have pushed Sri Lanka to the brink. It is reported that its debt to China is \$7.4 billion, or nearly 20% of its public external debt. So will the Government work with Sri Lanka—yes, to help it address its internal reconciliation, but also to reduce its exposure to China and dependence on Russian oil and to ensure that it can engage with the whole world, rather than being pushed to one side?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord—this is why we are working very closely. When I was last in Sri Lanka, we worked on the specific importance of ensuring the restructuring of its debt with the IMF. That programme will take time—up to about six months—to ensure the outcomes. The noble Lord is also right on infrastructure support. It is not just Sri Lanka; many countries across that region and beyond are reliant on Chinese infrastructure, which results in very long-term indebtedness to China. We are looking to see how we can form alliances and partnerships to overcome this, and the IMF rescheduling of the debt is the first step towards that. In the longer term, picking up on what I heard my noble friend say about the Commonwealth—it is good to have two ears, rather than just one—there is a role for it to play in this, which is why we are pleased that India has come forward and given credit lines to Sri Lanka to help it through its current economic troubles.

Lord Haselhurst (Con): My Lords, would this not be a mission that would fit very well with the purpose and aspirations of the Commonwealth as a whole, rather than just the United Kingdom?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I agree with my noble friend. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Secretary-General have engaged directly with the Sri Lankan Government, and we are looking to key partners. I mentioned the important role that India has played in supporting Sri Lanka at this time, as a near neighbour, both with energy issues and in providing credit lines to allow it to navigate its way through the economic challenges it faces.

Lord Naseby (Con): Is my noble friend aware that I shall personally support and work for a truth and reconciliation commission, established in Sri Lanka, rather similar to those in South Africa and Colombia? However, are there not two key initiatives that His Majesty's Government need to do to help? The first is to persuade the United Nations to remove the 20-year restriction on the source of the evidence in the Darusman report of 2011, which stated that up to 40,000 people were killed. Secondly, the UK Government themselves should surely now release to any commission the unredacted dispatches from the UK's respected and experienced military attaché, Colonel Gash, who was on the battlefield every day from 1 January to 18 May 2009, proving beyond doubt in his dispatches that there was no genocide.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I cannot agree with all aspects of my noble friend's questions because it is very clear that the whole point of standing up a truth and reconciliation commission in 2015 was that there was a real recognition, even by the Sri Lankan Government of that time, of the importance of bringing communities together to ensure that atrocities could be fully investigated and, more importantly, perpetrators could be held to account. That is why we have pursued the issue at the UN Human Rights Council, which is the right approach. Of course, in time, there is a need for domestic mechanisms, but the sad truth is that, since 2015, despite successive changes of Government, we have seen little progress with the truth and justice commission in Sri Lanka.

Lord Kamall (Con): My Lords, my noble friend the Minister and others have referred to some of the international organisations: the UN, the IMF and even the Commonwealth. Can my noble friend enlighten us on which other international organisations the UK Government are working with to help the people of Sri Lanka at this difficult time? I refer noble Lords to my registered interests.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as I said, it is important that there are international alliances. We are working with key countries in the region: I specifically mentioned India, which is an important partner, and the Commonwealth has been mentioned. I also mentioned the International Monetary Fund in

relation to the economy. We are working with a variety of UN agencies on the ground, including the World Food Programme, UNICEF and OCHA, to ensure that humanitarian issues and priorities are also focused on.

Lord Bellingham (Con): My Lords, last April, Sri Lanka became the first country in the Asia-Pacific region ever to default on its sovereign debt. Inflation is now running at 68%, and the UN predicts that nearly half of the population will be food insecure by the end of the year. So does the Minister agree with me that rebuilding the agricultural sector is absolutely crucial, after the Government's misplaced decision to ban fertilisers and sprays? What technical help can his department give?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, on the specifics, I will certainly follow up on what my noble friend said. I agree with him on rampant inflation, which was at 73.7% in September. Over the last month, it has reduced a tad, but that is nothing to speak of—there has been a marginal single-digit decrease, and I think it is now nearer the high 60s. My noble friend is also right that we need to work on ensuring that food insecurity is addressed, which is why we are working closely with institutions such as the World Food Programme to ensure that this is addressed as a priority.

NHS Dental Contract

Question

11.37 am

Asked by **Lord Young of Cookham**

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to review the NHS dental contract.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con): In July, the department announced a package of improvements to the NHS dental system, which included reform of the 2006 contract to ensure that dentists are remunerated more fairly and patient access is improved, especially for those with higher oral health needs. Implementation of these changes is under way, and we recently laid legislation in Parliament to deliver them. We continue to work with NHS England and the dental sector on further reform, which we plan to announce in 2023.

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): I am grateful to my noble friend for that reply and for the recent modifications to the contract. But does he agree that much more radical reform is needed to that contract, which was described as "not fit for purpose" by a Select Committee in another place, if we are to address the exodus of NHS dentists, encourage more to join, address the 91% of dental practices that no longer admit new adult patients and help areas of the country with no NHS dentists at all? When will we have the longer-term radical reform referred to the last time I asked this Question, in May?

Lord Markham (Con): I thank my noble friend, and I declare an interest: my wife is a dentist, although she is not practising at the moment. This is one of those

rare occasions when it is a case not of announcing new spend but of making sure that the £3 billion we spend is fully utilised. To answer the question directly, it is absolutely right that we need a radical package to make sure that dentists are contracting against their UDAs and finding working in this space worth while and profitable, so that we get the full use of that. I will happily come forward with further proposals, planned for 2023, on what we are going to do in this space.

Baroness Boycott (CB): My Lords, one reason why young children now go into hospital and have anaesthetics is to have all their teeth out, largely as a result of sugary diets. As we see through our Feeding Britain network, a lot of children do not have toothbrushes and definitely do not have toothpaste. Scotland has been trialling some really efficient systems whereby dentists go into school, give out free toothbrushes—which a lot of toothbrush manufacturers will happily supply—and get children into the habit of cleaning their teeth. Given the massive absence of dentistry, which will take a long time to fix, can the Government look at a simple measure such as that, which would greatly improve the nation's teeth, especially our kids'? It is a nightmare to have all your grown-up teeth taken out at eight years old; you are stuck with lousy teeth for ever, and it is not fair.

Lord Markham (Con): I agree, and I understand the problem. I also agree that we need to look at a broad range of measures. I was delighted that we passed the statutory instruments on water fluoridation recently, and we should look at new ideas. I was also delighted to see oral health advice included in the new family hubs being set up. We are willing to look at measures that work elsewhere as well, such as free toothbrushes in Scotland.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, the British Dental Association has proposed four simple emergency measures—changes which could be made to the dental contract that would make an enormous difference. The Minister referred to the regulations. Regulations in respect of the workforce will make significant changes too. They were in *Forthcoming Business* and then removed. When will they be heard in this House? This reform is urgently needed.

Lord Markham (Con): As mentioned, the new package of measures, which is all about encouraging dentists into the NHS space, will be brought forward next year. The workforce plan is now under way. However, central to all this is not the budget but making sure that it is fully utilised. As the noble Baroness said, that will happen by having more NHS dentists. We currently have 3,500 in training, which is working towards that, but, clearly, we need to work further.

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend the Minister agree that the state of NHS dental care in this country over many years is a national scandal? Following on from the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, on the importance of making sure that children not only pursue proper

dental health but eat the right food and do not have the wrong drinks, is he aware of the charity TasteEd, which is doing a huge job in schools to encourage children to eat the right kind of foods for health of all kinds?

Lord Markham (Con): I thank my noble friend. We need a 360-degree approach. It is not just about dentists on the ground, although we agree that we need more in the NHS; it is also about healthy eating, water fluoridation, and oral health workers in the family hubs, for which a £300 million budget has just been announced. I agree that we need to take all those actions.

Baroness Merron (Lab): My Lords, following much pressure, including in your Lordships' House, the Government have promised for next year independently verified workforce forecasts for the number of doctors, nurses and other professionals. Can the Minister confirm that the space to which he has repeatedly referred in this Question will include dentists? If so, can he commit to an assessment within this of the impact of the NHS dental contract on recruitment and retention?

Lord Markham (Con): My understanding is that the staff plan will include dentists, but I will confirm that in writing. I absolutely accept that the contract changes must attract people into the profession. For the dental deserts, we need to encourage, for example, a dentist who has been in practice for eight years to set up a new practice. They are used to being a dentist, but they are not used to raising the money to set up a new clinic in a new area, which is what they need to do. Clearly, that is the sort of support we need if are to tackle the dental desert issue. I am under no illusions as to what needs to be done, and we are working on it.

Lord Scriven (LD): My Lords, I declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. Does the Minister agree, despite the new package that has just come forward, with the Conservative chairman of the Local Government Association Community Wellbeing Board, who has said that the Government should urgently commit to a comprehensive dental workforce strategy and increase councils' funding of the public health grant in real terms to help deal with the dental desert in many parts of the country?

Lord Markham (Con): I thank the noble Lord. As I mentioned, dental deserts are very much a part of the package we are looking at. To give noble Lords an idea of the sense of direction, another approach to the workforce issue is a modular escalator system, and we are talking to the BDA about training. For instance, on the way to becoming a fully qualified dentist, might a dentist become part-qualified, allowing them to do some dental nurse treatments, thereby adding to that capacity in the meantime? These are all measures we are looking at to increase the workforce.

Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con): Can the Minister tell us what proportion of the population is actually receiving fluoride in their drinking water?

Lord Markham (Con): I will need to write to give the exact number. From memory, it is not a big number at the moment—less than 10%—but I will confirm that. That is why I was pleased that we agreed the measures the other day, so that we can expand that. Evidence shows that in areas where water is fluoridated—again, I am speaking from memory and I will confirm it in writing—tooth decay declines by as much as 20%, so it does work.

Baroness Jolly (LD): What advice does the Minister give to people in Cornwall for whom the nearest NHS dentist is 50 miles away but there is no public transport from the local town to the practice?

Lord Markham (Con): I am aware of some of the dental deserts. Some 700 urgent care centres have been set up to try to cater for such cases, and they have seen 4 million people. In total, there were about 26 million treatments last year. About 75% of patients who wanted to get an appointment were able to. Clearly, that leaves 25% who were not. We need to work further on that, including in Cornwall.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, the Minister's replies have been exceptionally helpful. I wonder whether he and the Government could consider what might be done to get non-practising dentists back into practice.

Lord Markham (Con): It is a good question. I will take the noble Lord's compliment of being exceptionally helpful; I hope I can give another helpful answer. We need to look at everything we can do to attract dentists. The contract is fundamental to that, because, unless it is attractive for them financially, it will not help.

Lord Bird (CB): Is it possible also to look at some of the innovations that are done socially, especially for homelessness? We have brought back travelling dentists, and maybe they can go to Cornwall and other places. We have invested in a business in Plymouth that goes around hostels, and it has been remarkably successful.

Lord Markham (Con): As mentioned before, we are open to all ideas to try to tackle this problem. As we all know, it has been going on for a long time—probably decades. A 360-degree solution is needed; we are open to looking at everything.

Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation

Question

11.48 am

Asked by Baroness Falkner of Margravine

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the use of Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and their impact on public scrutiny.

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Stewart of Dirleton) (Con): My Lords, strategic lawsuits against public participation, or SLAPPs, are an abuse of the

legal process designed to close down inquiries and prevent the publication of information in the public interest. It is the Government's intention to pursue primary legislation for targeted anti-SLAPP reform as soon as parliamentary time allows. We remain committed to upholding our fundamental democratic values of free speech and a free press, ending abuse of the legal systems of the United Kingdom and defending investigations in the public interest.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB): I thank the Minister for his reply, but I detect a lack of urgency. There is a good reason why these cases are known as intimidation cases. As he said, they are used to stifle public interest investigations by journalists, exposing those involved in corruption, illicit finance and political wrongdoing, aided and abetted by London law firms through forum shopping. This has a clear chilling effect on press freedoms, as Catherine Belton, Tom Burgis or even those working abroad, such as Paul Radu, can testify. Will the Minister take forward with a level of urgency proposals put forward by the anti-SLAPP coalition to allow for claims to be filtered out at an early stage by courts, to put in penalties to deter meritless claims and to provide compensation for those targeted?

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): In relation to the first two of the ameliorative matters which the noble Baroness identified, I can assure the House that those are within consideration and will be enacted in the forthcoming measure. As to the third matter, although the noble Baroness chides me, I can assure the House that what she styles as a delay is not in fact procrastination but a matter of identifying a suitable legislative vehicle to put these very important matters on to the statute book.

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, the Government claim to prize and to defend free speech, and the Minister has said that the Government's intention is to introduce primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. The problem is that fear of a costs order does not deter rich organisations and individuals from abusing the court process, with unmeritorious cases brought only to stifle journalists' criticism of their activities. So what has been holding the Government back from legislating to enable such cases to be stopped in their tracks, and how long will it be before the primary legislation will be introduced?

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): My Lords, as I said, the delay in this matter, if I may style it in those terms, is not a case of the Government attempting to procrastinate and to kick the matter into the long grass. Rather, it is, as I said in my Answer to the noble Baroness's Question, a matter of identifying the suitable legislative vehicle into which these measures can be inserted. Were we to proceed to insert this into, for example, the economic crime Bill, which was considered and dismissed, the risk would have been that we would have framed this very serious abuse of process too narrowly. That is why it is important that we legislate appropriately as well as quickly.

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, I declare my interest as chair of the Communications and Digital Committee and refer the House to my recent correspondence with both the Lord Chancellor and the Solicitors Regulation Authority. I welcome my noble friend the Minister's commitment to bring forward legislation, and I note his recognition of this matter being urgent. None the less, bringing forward any legislation is likely to take time, so what steps are the Government taking now, or could they take, to support those journalists and public bodies who are currently subject to this highly aggressive and costly legal activity, which, as we have already heard, is aided and abetted by solicitors?

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): My Lords, in answer to my noble friend's first point, the Solicitors Regulation Authority has already acted—and acted well—by issuing warnings to firms about the practices which characterise SLAPPs. It has instigated a thematic investigation of 20 firms thought to have been participating in this activity. As for the government answer, the Government are intending to bring forward this legislation, which will bring in caps on costs and allow for the rapid dismissal of inappropriate or insubstantial claims to foster a culture of free investigation and free speech.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Lab): My Lords, a conference has just taken place here in London about anti-SLAPP legislation. It is absolutely right, as the Minister has said, that the Solicitors Regulation Authority has issued a statement warning firms and solicitors about their support for these sorts of actions. This is about money and power. I ask the Minister whether the abuse of those kinds of injunctions and legislation will also be used to protect women who are bringing allegations against powerful men of sexual abuse in the workplace? The Philip Green case is an example of where the *Telegraph* was enjoined over five accusations, which were eventually exposed, and he then withdrew his claim against the women. These actions have been used against women too, so will the Government include women, and the abuse of the legal process by the powerful to silence them, in this?

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): My Lords, it is the privilege of the legal profession to act for the weak against the powerful. On the specific point which the noble Baroness raises, I will write to her. I can assure her and the rest of the House that the provisions against SLAPPs are intended to be drawn widely. She brings forward the important question of whether there is an imbalance against women in the steps being taken in this abusive process. I am grateful to her and will correspond with her.

Lord Lisvane (CB): My Lords, awaiting a suitable legislative vehicle is an ancient excuse—or possibly reason—for not legislating, but, with respect, I am a little sceptical about the Minister's assertion that inserting these provisions in an economic crime measure would, as it were, narrow them. Putting these provisions in a Bill which is largely about a different subject does not, of itself, narrow them; the key thing is how those provisions themselves are drafted.

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): The noble Lord is quite correct, and of course I defer to his extensive experience in this area. None the less, I submit that it is of fundamental importance that legislation is brought appropriately and in a manner which is workable. The Government are aware of attempts to bring in anti-SLAPP legislation in other jurisdictions, which have in fact been counterproductive and have served the interests of the people who would use this insidious means of stifling free speech and free investigation. The Government must take steps which work.

Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab): My Lords, I do not think that there are many of us who are really buying this defence from the Minister today, but I can confirm that these Benches would be very happy to work with the Government to find the time and the appropriate vehicle to achieve the ends that we all want to see. We are all concerned about transparency and trust in politics. Therefore, will the Minister please inform the House, first, of how many donors to the Conservative Party have made use of strategic lawsuits against public participation, and, secondly, of the total amount donated by these individuals?

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness for her indication of her preparedness to work on a matter which I think is a concern for the whole House. I am also grateful to her for her ready acknowledgment that these concerns are shared across the entire spectrum of British politics. As to her specific question, I will not comment on individual cases, and nor will noble Lords consider it appropriate for me to do so.

Lord Fox (LD): My Lords, I do not think that your Lordships' House doubts the sincerity of the Minister when he says he wants to get this legislation done, but he knows that there is a big queue of legislation trying to get through both Houses. One way of ensuring this happens quickly and efficiently when the slot comes is to publish a draft Bill, have some pre-legislative scrutiny, and get it in line and agreed before we actually get that slot to legislate.

Lord Stewart of Dirleton (Con): I take the noble Lord's point and can tell him that one of the campaigning organisations which has been doing magnificent work in this field has prepared a model law which will be scrutinised not only by the Government but, in due course, by parliamentary draftsmen to see how far that can assist the process of bringing something timeously on to the statute book.

World AIDS Day

Private Notice Question

11.58 am

Asked by **Lord Fowler**

To ask His Majesty's Government, in light of World AIDS Day and the estimated 650,000 annual deaths worldwide from HIV/AIDS, what plans they have to increase their contribution to eliminating the disease.

Lord Fowler (CB): My Lords, is it not a tragedy that, although we now have all the means to eliminate AIDS, unlike at the time when I was a Minister, the annual figures still show 650,000 annual deaths worldwide, including, very significantly, over 200,000 deaths of women and, worst of all, 100,000 deaths of children? In the light of this continuing emergency, how can it be justified that the Government have cut back the resources they are devoting to fighting this disease, and will they now reconsider that policy?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park) (Con): My Lords, the UK is committed to working in partnership to deliver on the global AIDS strategy and end the epidemic of AIDS by the end of this decade. This is evidenced by our recent pledge of £1 billion to the Global Fund, which will help to provide antiretroviral therapy for 1.8 million people. The UK also provides substantial funding to the World Health Organization and UNAIDS and supports countries to strengthen their health systems. Together we are working towards ensuring that all can access the prevention and treatment services needed to make progress on HIV and AIDS.

Lord Cashman (Lab): My Lords, I echo the words of the noble Lord, Lord Fowler. Some 38.4 million people globally were living with HIV in 2021 and, as we have seen with other pandemics, an infection in one country ultimately affects us all, so it is in our national interest that we increase funding to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Globally and nationally, we have seen incredible advances in tackling HIV. Central to those benefits is empowering individuals to test and take control and therefore live a healthy life with HIV positive status.

So I ask the Minister whether the Government will commit to widening the prescribing of PrEP beyond sexual health clinics to pharmacies, general practitioners, and community and maternity services? PrEP is part of the armoury that prevents transmission. We have the tools, but they are useless if they are not widely accessible.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, the UK met the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets for the first time two years ago in 2020, meaning that 95% of HIV positive individuals were diagnosed, 99% of those people who were diagnosed were receiving treatment and 97% of those receiving treatment were being virally suppressed. I very much note the suggestion by the noble Lord about increasing the availability of PrEP, and I shall convey that message to the health service.

Lord Allan of Hallam (LD): My Lords, there are concerns that a fall in HIV testing levels during the pandemic may hamper the Government's efforts to eliminate HIV transmission in England by 2030. Does the Minister share those concerns, and will the Government take extra measures to increase testing levels again?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, I do not have specific figures in relation to the rate of testing during the pandemic. If they exist, I shall

certainly make sure that they are made available. However, I can absolutely say that the UK remains completely committed to the global goal of achieving zero new HIV transmissions by 2030. As a nation, we have made big progress domestically, as I relayed in my previous answer, and internationally we remain one of the main funders and supporters of action to tackle HIV/AIDS.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB): My Lords, will the Minister take up the powerful point made by the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, that, in the domestic UK context, women are losing out on getting treatments, including PrEP? There is a very low take-up. Will he speak to his colleagues in the Department of Health about that?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): It is certainly the case globally that women with HIV have some of the highest maternal death rates, which is why our ending preventable deaths approach, which is a major focus of UK ODA, has a strong rights and equality focus and will remain a priority for the UK. In the domestic and UK context, I shall certainly convey that suggestion to the Department of Health.

Lord Herbert of South Downs (Con): My Lords, I welcome the Government's recent commitment of £1 billion to the Global Fund which, in the circumstances fiscally here in the UK, is a remarkable and generous donation and makes us one of the best contributors still in the world to that important fund. Of the 650,000 deaths from AIDS every year globally, to which my noble friend Lord Fowler referred, some one-third are from tuberculosis, which is the biggest single cause of death of people who have HIV. The co-infection of the two diseases remains a serious problem. Does my noble friend recognise the importance of tackling both major epidemics—tuberculosis and HIV—together? That commitment will continue to be important if we are to have some chance of beating these diseases—although there is no chance of beating TB by 2030—at least within the lifetime of a generation.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): I first thank the noble Lord for his comments about his contribution to the Global Fund. I agree with him—in the face of the budgetary pressures that we are facing, I was very relieved and pleased that we were able to make that commitment to the Global Fund, which is doing extraordinarily important work.

The noble Lord also makes an important point about TB. It is the case that until just a few years ago, the trajectory of TB was very much downwards. It was one of those historic illnesses that we had almost got to grips with, or certainly believed that we were getting to grips with. One problem is that we are seeing the weakening of the effectiveness of antibiotics. Currently, there is a limited supply of antibiotics and, if we continue to abuse them, as we are doing globally—well over half the world's antibiotics are used just to keep animals alive in factory farm conditions in which they would not otherwise survive—that will be the height of irresponsibility. We will be wasting globally this treasure—because antibiotics are a miracle cure that our ancestors would have dreamed of—just to get our

animals a bit fatter a bit quicker and to keep them alive in conditions in which we should not be keeping them in any case. So this is a priority—the UK is leading on this issue, and is doing extraordinarily important work on it—but I do not think that we can solve the problem that the noble Lord raised unless we get to grips with our abuse of antibiotics.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): I think the Minister is allowing his other passions to slip into his answers—and well done to him for doing that. I commend the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for his absolute consistency in championing this issue.

The role of UNAIDS is crucial for making progress in the global fight against HIV and AIDS, but it is now facing a severe shortfall in its operating budget. What steps will the Government take to support UNAIDS in building its capacity? Secondly, on the domestic front, the law really needs to keep up with the science, as has been referred to already. In recognition of this today, the Labour Party supports people with HIV having equal access to fertility treatments. Does the Minister agree that this is important? How can he help to take it forward?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): I echo the noble Baroness's remarks in relation to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, who has a long and distinguished record of championing this issue and is widely respected for having done so.

The noble Baroness asked about UNAIDS. Of course, the UK is completely committed to UNAIDS. We will continue to work to ensure that UNAIDS leads the implementation of the ambitious new global AIDS strategy for 2021 to 2026 at the UN high-level meeting on HIV in June last year. The UK was at the forefront of working to secure the highest level of commitment from our global partners so that the world has the best chance of meeting those 2030 goals to end AIDS.

On the domestic question, I am afraid that I am not qualified to answer it, but I instinctively agree with its premise and I shall make sure that the Department of Health has a look at that.

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester: My Lords, in sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls and young women are three times more likely to acquire HIV than adolescent boys and men. Can the Minister say what is being done to fund programmes which help to keep girls in education, which we know reduces their vulnerability to HIV by up to 50%?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The right reverend Prelate is right. We continue to support stronger health systems around the world more broadly, because that in turn helps to end AIDS-related deaths and prevent new HIV infections. As was said earlier, women with HIV have the highest maternal death rates, which is why our ending preventable deaths approach remains a priority for the UK.

Education—particularly the education of women and girls—has for some years been a top priority, as

enshrined in the integrated review and the international development strategy. It remains a priority and will remain one.

Lord Patel (CB): My Lords, a key challenge for the UK in meeting the target of eliminating HIV transmission by 2030 is the elimination of undiagnosed cases which, of the total of 107,000 cases, are currently probably around 5,000. How do the Government intend to tackle that?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, much of the work that we support is through the multilateral system—we were talking earlier about the Global Fund. Increasing diagnosis rates remains a key priority for not just the Global Fund but other multilateral organs. Through our support for those institutions, we are in turn supporting increased and escalated efforts to boost diagnosis rates.

Baroness Masham of Ilton (CB): My Lords, will the Government give some new publicity to the importance of the prevention of HIV/AIDS? Some people think that it has gone away; we have heard clearly and loudly today that it has not gone away.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): It is certainly right that, here in the UK, we have seen remarkable progress, and people in the UK can take comfort from the figures that I cited right at the beginning of this exchange. But the same is not true internationally—as we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Fowler—where the numbers are really shocking, with 650,000 annual deaths. So prevention has to be, as it is with all preventable diseases, a key priority. I hope that my answer just two questions ago in relation to prevention of early deaths, particularly among women and girls, will have provided some reassurance to the noble Baroness.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, I refer to the Minister's response to the question from the noble Lord, Lord Cashman, about the availability of PrEP beyond sexual health clinics. It is really important that it is more universally available. My question is: are we helping other countries to access PrEP, particularly for the women and children in Africa whom the right reverend Prelate referred to earlier on?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The wider availability of PrEP is an issue that I know the Government are working on. I do not belong to the relevant department, so I cannot provide authoritative figures, but the case is bullet-proof and I know that that view is shared by colleagues across government. But I will have to provide, via them, a more updated response to that, I am afraid.

In terms of the international rollout and availability of PrEP, I believe that that is something the Global Fund is also doing. The Global Fund is the main vehicle that we use and is therefore the main vehicle that we support. That is why our commitment to the £1 billion is so welcome. All that work is through those multilateral institutions.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, will the Minister remind the current Chancellor of the Exchequer that, as a newly elected MP and member of the International Development Committee, he led a campaign to ensure that the UK set annual targets, monitored them and delivered retrovirals across the developing world? Will he remind the Chancellor of the Exchequer of that commitment and suggest that he repeats it now?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My right honourable friend the Chancellor has long been a champion of UK Aid. I very much hope that, as a consequence, in his current capacity he will be able to do more than that. I hope that he will be able to return us as quickly as possible, as soon as the fiscal situation allows, to 0.7%. With 0.5%, we are still one of the most generous countries in the world, but it also inhibits some of the areas where we showed real leadership in the years up to that decrease. I have every confidence that the Chancellor will wish to do everything he can in his current post to bolster our position of global leadership through our deployment of aid, and part of that of course is having rigorous targets and ensuring that we have value for money.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, is not one of the major issues around HIV the stigma attached to people who are HIV positive? It is not widely understood but, with effective treatment, viral load can be undetectable, and those people cannot transmit the virus to other people. What are the Government doing both in the UK and globally to reduce the stigma associated with HIV?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The noble Lord makes an important point, and he too has been a vocal champion both in the domestic context and beyond. The UK itself as a country is a champion of human rights around the world, and we are committed to the principle of non-discrimination on any grounds, including on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity—the issues that are often conflated with the issue that we are discussing today. The noble Lord is absolutely right to point to the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and his point around the facts of the issue will have been recorded for posterity—the facts of the efficacy of current treatment and the removal of danger that that results in.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement of Recess Dates

12.15 pm

Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con): My Lords, I am very pleased to be able to announce the current plans for recess dates up to summer 2023. In doing so, I reconfirm the recess dates already publicised. As announced by my noble friend Lord Ashton of Hyde earlier this year, the House will rise for Christmas Recess on Wednesday 21 December and will return on Monday 9 January. On 21 December, the House will sit at 11 am. The February Recess dates have also already been announced, with the House rising on Thursday 9 February and returning on Monday 20 February.

Further ahead, for Easter, the House will rise on Thursday 30 March and return on Monday 17 April. To take account of the additional Coronation bank holiday, the House will rise on Wednesday 3 May and return on Tuesday 9 May. For Whitsun, the House will rise on Thursday 25 May and return on Monday 5 June. Finally, the current plan is for the House to rise for the Summer Recess on Wednesday 26 July.

As usual, these dates are subject to the progress of business and we will update the House if there are any changes to them. To prevent noble Lords having to write things down furiously, a notice with all these dates will be available in the Royal Gallery.

Leasehold Reform (Forfeiture) Bill [HL]

First Reading

12.16 pm

A Bill to make provision requiring landlords exercising a right of forfeiture or re-entry in relation to a property subject to a long lease to account to the tenant for the tenant's equity in that property and to hold the tenant's equity on trust; to restrict the landlord's right to legal and administrative costs; and for connected purposes.

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

Business of the House

Motion on Standing Orders

12.17 pm

Moved by Lord True

That Standing Order 44 (*No two stages of a Bill to be taken on one day*) be dispensed with on Monday 5 December to allow the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill to be taken through its remaining stages that day; and that, therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (*Amendments on Third Reading*), amendments shall not be moved on Third Reading.

Motion agreed.

Anti-lockdown Protest in Shanghai: Arrest and Assault of Edward Lawrence

Commons Urgent Question

The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given in the House of Commons on Tuesday 29 November.

“I find it hard to believe, given his powers of persuasion, that this is the honourable Gentleman's first Urgent Question. He is an ever-present ray of sunshine in Parliament, and we love him for it.

As the Foreign Secretary made clear yesterday, the arrest of a BBC journalist while covering the recent protests in Shanghai is a deeply disturbing and wholly unacceptable situation. Journalists must be able to do their job without fear of arrest or intimidation. The BBC has stated that the journalist was beaten and kicked by the police during his arrest, and was held for several hours before being released. In response, we are calling in the Chinese ambassador to make clear

the unacceptable and unwarranted nature of those actions and the importance of freedom of speech, and to demand a full explanation. We have also been in close touch with the journalist and the BBC throughout to gather the facts and provide consular support.

We recognise that the covid-related restrictions in China are challenging for the Chinese people. We urge the Chinese authorities to respect the rights of those who decide to express their views about the situation. Moreover, as the Prime Minister made clear yesterday in his Mansion House speech, the media—and, for that matter, our parliamentarians—must be able to highlight issues without fear of sanction or intimidation, whether in calling out human rights violations in Xinjiang and the curtailment of freedom in Hong Kong, or in reporting on the recent protests.

This, of course, follows the recent incident in Manchester. As we have previously made clear to the House, the apparent behaviour of staff at the Chinese consulate general was wholly unacceptable. In view of the gravity of that incident, we summoned the Chinese chargé d'affaires on 18 October and delivered a clear message through our ambassador in Beijing. There is now an ongoing investigation and it would be wrong to pre-empt the findings.

More broadly, we recognise that China poses a systemic challenge to our values and interests, which, again, the Prime Minister highlighted yesterday. That challenge grows more acute as China moves towards greater authoritarianism. That is why we are taking robust action to protect our interests and stand up for our values. That includes imposing sanctions, leading action at the UN and strengthening our supply chain resilience. Let me assure Members that, as part of our frank relationship with China, we will continue to raise our human rights concerns at the highest levels.”

12.17 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I start by welcoming the Government's prompt response, summoning the ambassador and providing consular support for Mr Lawrence. The Minister will be aware that we debated the International Relations and Defence Committee report recently, which stressed the need for an overall China strategy covering all aspects of our relationship, so that civil society, government departments and local government all know what direction the Government are taking.

In response to the Urgent Question, Minister Rutley said that the Government

“have not committed to publish a separate China strategy, but we will continue to maintain as much transparency as possible and keep Parliament updated on our approach to China. The integrated review will be the main focus for that.”—[*Official Report, Commons, 29/11/22; col. 784.*]

Of course, the Minister then said that the Government will be updating the integrated review, which we know has been promised before. Can the Minister explain why we cannot see an overall China strategy and when we will see the updated integrated review?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord and, like him, I welcome the prompt action that was taken and of course the release of the journalist. I assure all noble

Lords that we remain in direct contact with him. The ambassador was summoned here in London and our consul-general extended support to the individual in the country as well.

At this time, there is nothing further I can add to the response given by my honourable friend in the other place, but I reassure the noble Lord that we remain very focused on key priorities when it comes to our relationship with China. As he will know, we are focused on areas of human rights where we have been very clear in the support we extend to persecuted minorities. Of course, we are also very cognisant that there have been particular measures taken against Members of your Lordships' House and the other place by the Chinese authorities. It is ironic, and a reflection of the strength of the UK's position, that we stand by the rule of law, as that is something that has been sadly missing in the response to protests and the current action China has taken against Members of your Lordships' House and the other place.

On the issue of the integrated review, as my honourable friend said in the other place, we will be working through specific aspects of our relationship with China and that will be presented and, I am sure, debated in the usual way.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, in saluting the courage of Edward Lawrence, who returned to his role as a BBC journalist even after the assault occurred, will the Minister also pay tribute to those Chinese citizens, from Tank Man in Tiananmen Square and Bridge Man before the recent CCP congress in Beijing, to the young man who this week led protesters in Shanghai calling for Xi Jinping's removal and who was then seized by police and has disappeared? Will he reflect on the role of surveillance technology in attempting to suppress dissent, which was referred to here in the debate on the all-party amendment last night, and the comment yesterday to parliamentarians by Dr David Tobin of Sheffield University, who said

“It is exceptionally important that we don't import that technology here”?

Does the Minister promise to at least give new consideration to the all-party amendment passed last night?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I was not in the Chamber when the specific amendment was discussed, but of course it is important that these things are looked at. The noble Lord will be aware, on the issue of surveillance, of the recent statement made by the Cabinet Office about government security and issues of Chinese surveillance. We need to remain very vigilant on this. The issue of cyber challenges and threats posed by many states is very real and we need to be ever vigilant, particularly when it comes to surveillance in our own country.

On the broader issue of the protests, ultimately it is not for the UK to speculate on the leadership within China, but it is very clear that the issue of human rights is a priority. The noble Lord knows of my personal commitment on this; I join him in recognising the strength, character and courage that must be present in those who are seeking to stand up bravely in the

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

protests. The fact that innocent journalists were caught up for simply doing their job is again a reminder of the importance of championing media freedom.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, what attempts are His Majesty's Government making to work with our partners in the UN to build an international consensus, so that China, which is seeking to raise its profile as an international power, hears from all quarters that suppressing journalists, not least those who are doing their duties, and arresting people for these demonstrations is simply unacceptable in the modern world?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): The right reverend Prelate is right, and I agree with his second point. In the world we live in today, we have seen journalists lead the charge, reporting on conflicts and on violence. I pay tribute to them, and that is why I was proud that the United Kingdom teamed up with others, including the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, to ensure that we have a really focused and laser approach on the issue of suppressing media freedom and the rights of journalists.

On the right reverend Prelate's point on the UN, of course China is a P5 member and is now looking increasingly at contributions to various UN agencies. It has a particular view of the world that we do not share, and it is important that we rebut that very strongly. We should not just rebut it but present an alternative vision, one in which all freedoms and strengths of human rights are reflected, and make the case strongly to countries currently perceived as fragile and embarking on the road of democracy that pluralist democracies are the best model. Issues of freedom of religion, freedom of media and the rights of journalists are very much part and parcel of that process.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Lab): My Lords, first I pay tribute to the Minister for his great work on human rights globally. As well as the assault on Edward Lawrence, the BBC's former China correspondent who reported and exposed truths about Xinjiang's re-education camps, including about sexual violence against Uighur women, had to be moved to Taiwan following pressure and threats from the Chinese authorities. Was the Foreign Office able to raise that in meetings with the Chinese ambassador in this country?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, on the noble Baroness's specific question, the summons was specific to the incident that had taken place. When a summons happens, having led a few myself, they are pretty short, sharp and to the point. I accept the noble Baroness's broader point about the continued suppression of rights that we continue to see and the challenges we find. Recently, as she will be aware—perhaps this is why I am looking a degree jaded—for the last 48 hours we have had a really intense conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict, with more harrowing accounts from particularly young girls and women but also young men who have to endure this violence around the world.

It was also appropriate, I felt—and I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, in this respect—to ensure we showcase that, when we talk of conflict, we are not

talking just of war; we are talking of the suppression of rights in conflict. Often, when wars are perceived to be at an end, conflict continues, and the suppression of vulnerable communities, minorities and, indeed, women and girls, continues. I assure noble Lords that we will continue to update the House on specific issues we pick up and, most importantly, to be informed by the expert opinion in your Lordships' House.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, is it not all the more incumbent on us to be exemplary in the way we uphold freedom of speech in this country?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I absolutely agree with my noble friend and I assure him that, when I talk of human rights internationally, I always use the phrase, "We never forget our own backyard". Our human rights were hard fought and there were incredible champions. We are talking about issues of religion, equality and justice, and it is important that we never lose sight of the fact that human rights is never a job done. That applies equally at home as it does abroad.

Baroness Blackstone (Lab): My Lords, as a member of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee, may I press the Minister further on his response to my noble friend Lord Collins on a coherent strategy? It is now some time, more than two years, since the committee asked the Government to come up with a coherent strategy. It is very disappointing that all we are getting is an ad hoc response to everything that happens in China, rather than a proper framework within which we can operate our foreign policy.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as I said to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, the updated integrated review will provide the coherent strategy the noble Baroness articulates. I do not think we are disjointed or not linked up: I think we have seen a quite coherent approach across government on issues we have raised consistently. When it comes to China, it is important, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton, reminded us, to act jointly on issues of surveillance.

Internationally, we are looking at the growing influence of countries that will have different objectives to our own on destabilisation or, indeed, on long-term debt, which was talked of earlier in your Lordships' House. On the suppression of human rights, there needs to be coherence in our approach. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is, if I can put it this way, the custodian of our international and global response and I assure the noble Baroness that in whatever we are doing, including the review, we are working coherently and together with key departments across His Majesty's Government.

BBC World Service

Motion to Take Note

12.29 pm

Moved by Lord Alton of Liverpool

That this House takes note of the importance of the BBC World Service and the impact of cuts to its services.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, throughout the autumn of 2022, the BBC has been celebrating its 100-year anniversary, but drastic cuts to the BBC World Service—and the loss of 382 jobs and of radio services—have dampened the celebrations and left many dismayed and angry. I am grateful to my Cross-Bench colleagues for choosing this Motion, to all noble Lords who will speak, to the Minister who will reply and to the Library for its background note. We especially look forward to the maiden speech of my noble friend Lord Hampton.

When the BBC World Service started life in 1932 as the BBC Empire Service, Sir John Reith—later Lord Reith—played down expectations:

“Don’t expect too much in the early days ... The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good”.

Seven years later, in the context of a world war, Lord Reith’s doubts had been dispelled. I wonder what he would have made of BBC World Service audiences in 2022 of 365 million people—up 13 million on the previous year—and news in over 40 languages. He would certainly have approved of Allan Little’s story of how, in Paris, an elderly Jewish man had agreed to give him an interview because, as a boy in hiding in wartime Poland, the BBC was the only way he kept hope alive.

Penelope Fitzgerald, who worked for the BBC during the Second World War, wrote a funny and touching novel called *Human Voices* set in the broadcasting studios of the BBC during the London Blitz. It captured the spirit of the wartime BBC in what was described as:

“A tribute to the unsung and quintessentially English heroism of imperfect people”.

Fitzgerald said:

“Broadcasting House was in fact dedicated to the strangest project of the war, or of any war, that is, telling the truth. Without prompting, the BBC had decided that truth was more important than consolation, and, in the long run, would be more effective. And yet there was no guarantee of this. Truth ensures trust, but not victory, or even happiness.”

Truth and trust: so true today in the era of fake news and, especially, Putin’s propaganda.

Whether in struggles today between democracy and dictatorship—as in Ukraine, Iran, North Korea, Burma, China and elsewhere—or during the dark days of Nazi-occupied Europe, the BBC World Service has always been trusted to provide dispassionate, fact-based and truthful reporting. Even the late Mikhail Gorbachev once said that he had relied on the BBC to learn what was really going on in the world. I once met a young Ukrainian woman who told me that the proudest moment of her life was when she told her parents that she was going to work for the BBC World Service. They had listened to it clandestinely throughout the whole Soviet era.

Last May, the Minister told me that 5 million Ukrainians were listening to the BBC via its digital platform and that 17 million Russians—triple the usual number—had listened to it during the previous week. Can he tell us what the current audience estimates are? Are we happy that ceasing our radio broadcasts to Russia a decade ago has been a bonus for Putin’s state-controlled media? Was this a wise decision?

I co-chair the all-party parliamentary groups on Eritrea and North Korea. Seven years ago, at the conclusion of a long campaign, I was able to thank the FCO and the BBC for agreeing to begin broadcasts to the Korean peninsula. A United Nations report on North Korea showed a country in which there was

“an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought ... as well as of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and association.”

Breaking such information blockades and our commitment to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—upholding the right to unimpeded free access to information and news—are central to the ethos of the BBC World Service.

Eight years ago in a previous Cross-Bench debate, many of us spoke about its role in promoting our belief in human rights, democracy and the rule of law—what Joseph Nye described as the exercise of soft power, or smart power as I prefer to call it. That debate followed a House of Lords Select Committee report which insisted that the World Service represented “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion”.

This is essential to UK diplomacy and prosperity, but the ability to do these things depends entirely on resources. The Select Committee pleaded that the budget “is not reduced any further in real terms”.

You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. That central question of funding will dominate today’s debate. I know that my noble friend Lord Hannay will also speak to this.

Traditionally, the funding came from the Government and therefore taxation, based on the ability to pay. By comparison, the licence fee is regressive and not determined by income. In a battle for tight resources, the World Service is bound to suffer if it must compete with “Doctor Who”, “Strictly Come Dancing” or even domestic news services. Why should we expect a listener in Liverpool to pay via their licence fee for services in a language they do not understand which the BBC broadcasts to the listener in Lahore, or a viewer in Bradford for BBC services in Beijing, or a pensioner in Yeovil for services in Yangon? This should not come from the licence fee but be seen as a legitimate public expenditure via taxation. As Tim Davie said at Chatham House last week:

“there is only so much we can ask the licence fee payer in Penrith to pay for the language services ... This is a strategic decision for the UK”.

In 2014 the World Service budget, given as FCO grant in aid, was £245 million. If grant had continued and matched inflation, it would have led to an increase of £62 million and a total budget of £307 million in 2022. The actual figure, now rendered from the licence fee, is £95 million. That is a cut of £213 million. How much clearer and better it would be if the World Service was funded once again from the FCDO, as part of a ring-fenced allocation within a restored ODA budget, as the Minister referred to in answer to the Question that preceded this debate.

When I drew another Minister’s attention earlier this year to a report by the National Union of Journalists which highlighted the damage being done to the World Service by the uncertainty of funding, he said

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

“the value this Government place on the service that is being provided internationally is absolute and there is no question of it being cut back.”—[*Official Report*, 10/3/22; col. 1553.]

In January, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, told me that

“We strongly value the work of the BBC World Service in promoting our values globally through its independent and impartial broadcasting”

and that

“The FCDO is committed to providing grant-in-aid funding for the BBC World Service through to 2025.”

However, like the curate’s egg, it is there only in parts.

The BBC says that grave and deep cuts of £285 million a year, necessitated by the Government’s freezing of the licence fee for two years, is leading to hundreds of key posts closing. This is happening as dictators and autocrats are more than willing to fill the void as the free world retreats from the global dissemination of news and at a moment when, in places such as Ukraine, Iran and Taiwan, the need for objective news has never been greater. The numbers are stark: 225 jobs in the United Kingdom, 156 in bureaux and 381 total job cuts from global languages, which could amount to a fifth of staff. Although no language services will close, the BBC says that some TV and radio programmes will stop. BBC Arabic radio and BBC Persian radio will cease, all aimed at saving £28.5 million. I know that my noble friend Lady Coussins will say more on this.

What of the Bengali service? What of the 40% of the world, 2 to 3 billion people, who still have no access to reliable or affordable internet services? Places such as northern Nigeria are a breeding ground for the likes of Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa, about which I know my noble friend Lady Cox will speak. How will the cuts impact our reach throughout Africa? What is the future of the radio transmitting station in Kranji, Singapore, which can reach four countries that represent half the world’s population—India, China, Pakistan and Indonesia? What about the BBC broadcasts to the Korean peninsula, for which I and the all-party group campaigned successfully? I have sent the Minister details on this and hope he can say more about the future of that service.

Deep cuts to the World Service language services follow separate “savings” to be made from the closure of the domestic BBC News channel and BBC World News, with a single BBC News channel. In London, there will be 70 fewer television journalists following and reporting on news, which will be aimed at a global audience led by international stories but shown at times in the UK. This is like Dr Dolittle’s fictional pushmi-pullyu; the joint channel will be a two-headed news beast, neither one thing nor the other. Stories about domestic matters will continually fight against a global news agenda and bumping important issues around the world off the air.

Early Day Motion 504, tabled in the House of Commons on 26 October, draws attention to the cuts in services and jobs, underlines the role of radio when “digital-only services are lost owing to the blocking of internet access”,

and expresses concern about the impact of the closure of the BBC Persian radio service and BBC Arabic radio—with 10 million listeners—while an uprising is taking place in Iran. Let me spell it out: for the past three months, BBC Persian has played a key role in covering the widespread women-led, anti-regime protests across Iran, and the brutal, violent crackdown that has followed. Heavy censorship limits local media in its broadcasts, but BBC Persian has an average weekly audience of 18.9 million people, with radio reaching a weekly audience of 1.6 million people and producing material for the BBC Persian website and social media. Closing the radio means that from midnight to 5 pm the next day—for 17 hours—the BBC Persian service has no scheduled live broadcast. Of course, we are now told that this space may be filled by a Saudi-funded channel. Closing it while the regime tries to block digital and online platforms is extraordinarily short-sighted. I know that the noble Lord, Lord Collins, feels deeply and strongly about this and will no doubt refer to it.

While dozens of Persian service journalists were spending day and night informing people of the protests, the BBC announced its plans to cut BBC Persian radio, resulting in the loss of nine journalistic jobs and a meagre saving of around £1 million. We should note that this journalistic work has come at a huge personal cost for brave BBC journalists and their families back in Iran. They have faced harassment and intimidation, interrogation, arrest, asset seizing and freezing, and despicable pressure to force them to leave the BBC. They face a barrage of daily abuse and threats online, simply because they are doing their professional job as independent, impartial journalists. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently labelled BBC Persian as terrorist, which could have even more catastrophic consequences for journalists’ families. Cutting BBC Persian at a time of widespread protests across Iran will be celebrated by those who rule there. I have been told about prisoners held in Middle Eastern prisons whose only contact with the outside world is this BBC radio service. For millions of others, trapped in the “prisons” of autocratic regimes which prohibit impartial local media, these services are hugely valued as a rare place to hear the truth rather than unremitting propaganda. Radio still matters.

As the free world retreats, step up Putin’s RT and the CCP’s China media—trusted sources of news? You must be joking, but it is not funny. Has no one noticed that, in the face of genocide against Uighur Muslims, exiled Tibetans, threatened Taiwanese, beleaguered Hong Kongers, and brave dissenting voices throughout China, retaining a strong BBC presence is crucially important? Welcome though resources for a new China unit with a team in London will be, it should be as well as, not instead of. I declare my interests as a patron of Hong Kong Watch and my work with all-party groups.

To conclude, BBC World has given people hope in times of oppression, despair and crisis, and despite many competitors, it is *primus inter pares*. It is our best-known cultural export; the most trusted news brand; and crucial to diplomacy, culture and commerce. I hope the message from today’s debate during these 100 years celebrations will be to insist that the BBC’s

global reach is enhanced and not savagely cut; that it remains first among equals; that we will not accept the emasculation and irreparable degradation of British influence overseas; and that we will look again at a funding model that is wholly unsuited to ensuring that, in the battle of ideas between dictatorship and democracy, our voice in the UK is not silenced. I beg to move.

12.44 pm

Baroness Browning (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for bringing this very important debate to the Chamber today. I begin by paying tribute to all those reporters and newsgatherers around the world who risk life and limb, and very often the safety of their own families, to deliver the news in a format which not only we can trust in this country but is trusted and respected globally.

It is not just because I am an insomniac that I am a great fan of the BBC World Service. I do not go to sleep until the business news is finished, which I think takes me up to about two o'clock in the morning, but there we are—I was always told that once you get older you need less sleep. I enjoy the World Service, but so too do the 458 million people a week who hear it in 43 different languages. We have heard the noble Lord, Lord Alton, explain the financial crisis that is threatening the World Service, and I am very concerned that certain languages are proposed to be dropped, including Chinese, Arabic and some from the Indian subcontinent. That is very concerning.

Correspondents in 75 news bureaus around the world collect this news for us. In my childhood, my late mother worked most of her working life for BBC Monitoring at Caversham Park, so as a girl I grew up knowing many of the people who translated the news from Russia during the Cold War, and I grew to have a great respect for the work they did and the standard they set in reporting news from across the globe.

The BBC also reports between nations—how important that is for those countries where freedom of speech is challenged on a daily basis. The financial situation it faces, due mainly to the frozen licence fee at the moment but also, along the lines that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, has so clearly described to the House today, to this change of making the BBC itself fund so much of the World Service from the licence fee. That idea is past its sell-by date. The Government must take this debate today and look again with fresh eyes at how the World Service, if it is to be retained, can maintain its reputation, as it must. The financial settlement for the World Service must be reconsidered. It is really quite anachronistic to say that this is just like any other programme coming out of the BBC. We have heard, and those of us who speak to people who listen to the World Service from other countries know, that it is not only respected but relied upon. It may be a national treasure to us, but it is regarded as a national treasure in many other countries as well.

The ability of Governments to deny internet access is also an issue that I want to raise. I fully understand why the BBC has plans to increase its digital output; that is very important. However, there are times when radio transmission is equally important—for example, very often in circumstances where people are either at

war or in conflict, or where there is a regime in place that simply wants to deny its own people the opportunity to hear the truth. Of course, it is the truth for which the BBC World Service has such a good reputation. The Government have a role to play here. I say to my noble friend on the Front Bench that I hope that he will take this Bill—this debate, I should say, although it should be a Bill—away and see this as a sea change in the way this House regards how the future of the BBC World Service is to be managed.

I finish with a report from Reporters Without Borders. It was produced in May of this year, so it is very up to date. It showed that journalism is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries it ranks, and the situation is ranked as “very serious” in a record 28 countries. I am 76—go on, I have said it—and I have lived through the end of the Second World War and the Cold War, when we were all taught in school what to do if the bomb was dropped, but I find the world a very dangerous place, far more so than I remember it, in terms of uncertainty, in the course of my lifetime. The world needs the BBC World Service; the Government must secure it.

12.49 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Browning. I am delighted to know about her nocturnal habits; I will not share mine with noble Lords, but I do not have her stamina to carry on as late as she does. However, I have listened to the World Service, particularly when abroad, and found it useful on occasion to pick up and to follow. I will depart a little from her in terms of the concerns she has about new technologies, because I believe that perhaps there are opportunities here that we are not looking at sufficiently. However, the points she makes are very important and we should reflect on them.

I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for securing this debate and for his comments. He is truly one of the consciences of the House and constantly reminds us of things that we sometimes tuck away and do not think about enough—I am grateful to him for doing it again on this occasion. He is also tireless in pursuit of his pursuits but also gracious with us, which makes him very easy to work with.

I am looking forward to that maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, and I hope that there will be many more of his speeches to come.

This is a debate which perhaps could have laid with the DCMS as the sponsoring department, but we are grateful to have the Minister from the FCDO responding. I am looking forward to his comments, and particularly to his take on the wording, which has carefully been put in front of him, on whether he is able to encourage the importance of the BBC World Service—I hope he will be able to do that—and whether he will reflect on the impact of the cuts, which is much in line with both previous speeches. How does he reconcile the FCDO position on this, and what will he do about that in terms of funding but also, more importantly, with regard to the constitutional issues raised by it?

On the money points, the point has been made, which I want to echo, that the World Service is funded mainly by the UK licence fee. The licence fee is of

[LORD STEVENSON OF BALMACARA]

course a tax on the receipt of telecommunications, not a fund for the BBC. We need to remember that that is the way in which it is framed in the law and how it is actually used in practice—of course, that raises issues about non-payment. What is the Foreign Office's position on that? We know that the BBC licence fee is under review; does it have a position, has it been made public, and, if so, could he share that with us? If, for example, he is minded towards a subscription view, does not that have quite serious consequences for the way in which the BBC is able to fund its World Service? A subscription will certainly reduce the amount of money available and would play to the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, in his comment about why people who perhaps do not have any direct use for the World Service will be prepared to pay for that as it goes forward.

My second point about the way in which the funding currently operates is the question about grant in aid. The grant in aid from the Foreign Office, welcome though it is, is relatively small relative to the overall cost of the BBC and only a quarter of the current cost of the World Service. There is also a timing and a longevity point—this has been mentioned in relation to inflation, but it is wider than that. Can the Foreign Office do anything to try to align better the funding streams it is able to provide to the BBC and to link those to the licence fee settlement? After a lot of fuss and bother last time round, the Government, slightly unwillingly, agreed to work on a five-year basis for the BBC, so at least it has some longer visibility about where its funding is coming from, pace inflation, because working on a five-year or 10-year basis is a lot different from the rather uncertain way of doing this at each spending review. Spending reviews seem to come even more frequently than snowstorms, and we are not very long-sighted about this if we are going to wait only until the next time, when the next Chancellor or the next crisis curtails the previous plans. These are important matters.

Finally, on governance, it is important to note that the BBC is governed by royal charter. That used to be a very secure way of doing it but is rather less so following recent discussions in the last five years. The royal charter currently says that

“the BBC should provide high-quality news coverage to international audiences”.

So are we saying, if we are changing this, that we want to change the charter in this respect and make it on a fee-based basis? Are we really saying that or do we believe, as others have said, that the World Service is indeed

“perhaps Britain's greatest gift to the world this century”?

We need to be certain about what it is we look for, and if we are happy with the current arrangements, the consequences of that are different constitutional arrangements and different financing. These are important matters which cannot be ducked.

Does the FCDO agree with the director-general's changes? If it is merely funding a body that has full responsibility for its own actions, it should not have too much to say, despite what the licence agreement requires in terms of the BBC agreeing with the Foreign Secretary. What happens about going digital—does it

have a view on that? These issues need to be taken into account as we go forward. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

12.55 pm

Lord McNally (LD): My Lords, as ever, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, and I associate myself with the questions he has just asked. I think they belong to a wider debate we must have about the BBC. Nevertheless, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on the timeliness of this debate, as was illustrated by the Urgent Question that went just before it.

On Monday, the Prime Minister made the traditional foreign policy speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, in which he set out his views on Britain's place in the world. In examining that role in the world, it is essential that the strength and influence of the soft power provided by the World Service is recognised. “This is London calling the world” still carries a resonance and respect that is unmatched by any other international broadcaster. The World Service could have no higher compliment than the efforts which authoritarian regimes such as Iran, China and Russia make to try to silence it.

The noble Lords, Lord Alton and Lord Stevenson, and the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, set out many of the facts that are put in strength of this case, and five minutes is a short time to make all the points. Therefore, although I am grateful for the many briefings I have received, and I assure the authors that they will not go to waste, I want to concentrate on this question of funding. It is important to ensure that the funding of the World Service and its remit are considered in wider terms, as the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, has just said. These decisions should be made by government and Parliament assessing all factors rather than by a cash-strapped BBC under constant attack from vested political and commercial interests.

That would mean reversing the decision taken in 2010 to place responsibility for funding the World Service with the BBC. In 2011, the Foreign Affairs Committee in the other place warned that this would have

“major long-term ramifications for the future of the World Service”—and so it has proved.

I was a member of the coalition Government at that time and must accept my share of collective responsibility for it. It was clearly a mistake, and I support calls for a new regime, for funding the World Service, or a return to the former one, in the light of today's realities. I suppose my defence for this change of mind is the dictum, often attributed to Lord Keynes, that when the facts change, I am entitled to change my mind—and, my goodness, have not the facts changed in the last 10 years?

A decade ago we were about to open the new “golden age” in our relations with China to which the Prime Minister referred in his Mansion House speech. Putin's Russia had not emerged as the aggressor it is today, Brexit had not occurred, and an influential wing of the Conservative Party had not targeted the BBC in its culture wars. Whatever the rationale behind the decisions taken in 2011, they do not apply to the conditions we face today.

World Service funding needs to be assessed and provided in response to specific needs and national priorities, not as a response to the immediate budget constraints of the BBC. Its funding, as has been said, should revert to being a parliamentary grant in aid, with all departments that benefit from its work sharing the burden. In making that assessment we should also recognise the benefit of the World Service to our whole broadcasting ecology by providing correspondents with deep empathy and understanding of their home territories. This feeds into the BBC's general news coverage and more general provisions, from documentaries to specialist podcasts. Here I associate myself again with a tribute to the courage and fortitude of the correspondents who carry out this work for us.

I wish the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, well in his maiden speech. I hope that this debate will give Parliament and government pause for thought about how we keep and sustain the soft power assets of the World Service and its wider cultural and reputational benefits during those difficult times.

In his Mansion House speech when he was Chancellor, the Prime Minister promised that the integrated review of foreign policy would be with us early in the new year. I hope that the Minister can assure us that the review will include an assessment of the contribution of the World Service to achieving our aims, along with a clear commitment that the World Service will have the budget to fulfil those objectives in the years ahead.

1 pm

Baroness Coussins (CB): My Lords, in 2017 the then International Relations Committee, of which I was a member, published a report of our inquiry into the Middle East, during which we held a round-table discussion with 30 young people from almost every country in that region. We asked them what they saw as the main positive British social and cultural influences. The BBC World Service was named overwhelmingly as one of the top three, the other two being Premier League football and Monty Python.

I endorse everything that my noble friend Lord Alton said about the importance of the World Service as a tool of soft power. One reason it is so effective is its extensive range of foreign language services, at the last count broadcasting in 43 languages. However, since 2012 these services have also been subject to various changes and cutbacks, driven in part by overall budget constraints and in part by strategic or operational decisions on what the most appropriate broadcasting format is for a particular language service, with a shift to digital being the prevailing change, as we have heard. In the latest strategic review, seven language services became digital only, with Persian and nine other languages having their radio service closed completely.

I get the overall case for digital but ask the BBC and His Majesty's Government to think again about whether digital-only services are always the right way to go, especially in the light of another important aspect of the latest review, which said:

"The World Service will continue to serve audiences during moments of jeopardy and will ensure audiences in countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Afghanistan have access to vital news services, using appropriate broadcast and distribution platforms."

Although not mentioned in that list of countries, Iran is currently a clear case for where digital services may not be the appropriate platform in moments of jeopardy. We know that internet access there is restricted or blocked, so reliance on old-school radio broadcasts may well be the best or only way to provide access to those vital news services. I hope that the World Service can find a way to be flexible within the parameters of its new strategy by accepting that in some places, at some times, language services by radio will be best suited to moments of jeopardy.

Such flexibility will undoubtedly not be cost-free. Can the Minister give an assurance that additional funding from the FCDO will be made available to enable the World Service to provide services on the most appropriate platform or media in challenging situations? Does he agree that when and if a new funding formula or business model for the BBC replaces the licence fee, a separate, dedicated impact assessment should be made of any new proposal's impact on the World Service specifically, taking into account its soft power value?

Another indicator of how important and effective the World Service is and has been in Iran is the length that the Iranian authorities will go to in stopping people working for it, whether in Iran or London. Dual nationals especially, and their families, have been targeted with harassment, death threats, arrests and detention, simply because they work for the World Service. Since 2017, and reinforced in October this year, the Iranian Government have pursued criminal investigations into BBC Persian staff, alleging that their work constitutes a crime against Iran's national security. Over 150 individuals, mostly dual nationals, are the subjects of an injunction to freeze their assets. Interrogation techniques have become more frightening and aggressive towards elderly parents, siblings and other family members. Female staff in London are being particularly targeted with online attacks, fake stories about rape and sexual harassment by male colleagues, and fake pornographic pictures posted on social media. Staff have been unable to return to or visit Iran to see sick or dying elderly relatives, for fear of detention or worse.

Can the Minister please update the House today on what further steps the Government can and will take to up the ante on their representations to the Iranian Government? The problem has not eased up; it has escalated, most notably since the World Service coverage of the protests since the death of Mahsa Amini.

1.05 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for tabling this debate, and for his excellent exposition of the impact and importance of the BBC World Service.

The BBC World Service is one of the most potent ways in which we can act in the world, not least to help those persecuted people who often are voiceless. I think of the debate that we had a couple of weeks ago about the hundreds of thousands of women on the streets of Iran. I think about the debates and Questions in this House about the various persecuted people in China. They need accurate reporting and,

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]

very often, knowing that something is being reported gives people hope and keeps them going when they are being crushed by their own authoritarian leaders.

The World Service is a way of spreading our values, encouraging change, and providing an independent and impartial voice to those who are voiceless. Accurate and truthful reporting is an increasingly rare phenomenon in our world. Sadly, we saw what happened in America under President Trump but, more worryingly, under President Putin and from China, we realise the huge amount of energy being put into suppressing truthful and accurate reporting. I think of those words of Jesus:

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Truth is very often unpalatable. It is often unpalatable to the powers in this country but, ultimately, the facts and the truth are what we need. It will help us, however painful it is, to build a better and fairer world.

It is interesting that His Majesty’s Government think that soft power is important. The integrated review, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, states:

“The UK’s soft power is rooted in who we are as a country: our values and way of life... It also enhances our ability... ultimately, to effect change in the world.”

Therefore, it is ironic that a Government who support soft power are now cutting the World Service. Surely these two things do not go together. It is precisely because the World Service broadcasts unbiased reports, offering information often covered up by authoritarian regimes, that it is so powerful. Many people in many different parts of the world look to the World Service for independent and accurate reporting. Since September, the journalists at BBC Persian have been bravely covering the ongoing protests and the brutality against women by the Iranian regime, which the Iranian state news and local media have not. It is extraordinary that BBC Persian has been deemed a terrorist organisation, having its assets frozen and with journalists even being arrested. Yet, as we have heard, it is a service that reaches over 20 million Iranians weekly. Surely, at a time when the Iranian people are standing up against horrendous injustice, we should not be cutting one of the few lifelines that these people have.

Of course, the cuts to that service will affect not only the Iranians but people across the entire region. The BBC proposes to close BBC Arabic, a radio network that has operated for 84 years and reported independently and impartially on such events as the Arab spring protests some years ago. The BBC also plans to reduce its presence in Myanmar, when the Rohingya and other people are facing the most appalling persecution. I have already mentioned the challenges in China.

The BBC World Service is uniquely positioned to challenge these regimes simply by reporting the truth. It is an essential element of the UK’s soft power and a vital lifeline to many people. I support the many noble Lords who have already spoken in the debate to underline the importance of the service and to urge the Government to come to a new settlement to ensure not only that it is sustained but that its service is enhanced.

1.10 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on securing this debate. I endorse his words and those of noble friends who have spoken before me. I agree with the majority of what has been said.

This debate gets to the heart of what we wish our international standing to be, and what it actually is. Cuts to the BBC World Service threaten to undermine the reach and quality of its reporting, to open the door to unsavoury competitors, and to reduce the influence of one of our most valuable institutions, which is a tremendous force for good and a source of soft power.

Earlier this week, the Prime Minister spoke about how

“our country has always looked out to the world.”

He set out his ambition for a foreign policy upholding freedom and openness, and a Britain engaging with the world from the Arctic to the Indo-Pacific. I admire and support his vision but it cannot be achieved without resources, nor is it consistent with further cuts to the World Service.

The last few years have been a reminder of the importance of the World Service. Information is more available than ever, and trustworthy information all too hard to find. Misinformation can be fatal for individuals, ethnic groups and societies, as we have seen in Myanmar during the ethnic cleansing operation against the Rohingya.

In this context, the World Service is crucial—for the Russian dissident, the Syrian refugee and the Afghan girl hoping to learn about the world. Its investigations have real world impact: a pioneering report by “Africa Eye” resulted in prison sentences for militias who massacred civilians. The efforts of autocracies to circumscribe the World Service and prevent its reporting are in themselves testament to its importance.

I know that my noble friend the Minister and his colleagues recognise the value of the World Service. This was reflected in the very welcome additional support they provided for journalism in Russia and Ukraine earlier this year. In a crisis you need the BBC, but if it is to be able to fulfil the crucial roles that they value it must have sufficient funding not just in a crisis but at all times, so that it can maintain and build the knowledge and skills which make it so important.

The World Service is already making cuts of £28.5 million by 2023. It will have to cut 382 jobs, as we have heard. These are cuts to expertise and experience. Local journalists, working in the language of the people they are reporting on, are an important source of knowledge for their colleagues in the BBC, for us in the United Kingdom and for audiences around the world. Once lost, knowledge and experience are not easily regained. I hope my noble friends in government will heed that point in relation to the rest of the FCDO’s work and partners as well.

How you deliver news also matters. According to the International Telecommunication Union, there are 5.3 billion internet users worldwide. That leaves 2.7 billion people offline—people for whom radio is often a crucial service and connection to the wider world. We

must not leave them without access to reliable information. If future savings are required, which seems likely following the two-year freeze in the BBC's licence fee income, without more funding from the FCDO it will be not just individual jobs at threat but entire language services.

The World Service does offer value and not just in what it provides; its value is compounded by what replaces it. We can see this clearly in the western Balkans. The BBC closed down the last of its local language services in the region in 2011. I welcome the fact that it re-established a Serbian service recently, but in its absence other international "news" services have been able to flourish. Sputnik and Russia Today have a significant malign presence. Sputnik's Serbian-language reports are provided free to local media, working closely with Russia's proxies to spread Russian propaganda and undermine liberal democratic values and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. The news as told by Sputnik portrays NATO as a threat and Russia always as a friend. Divisions are emphasised and exacerbated. The results can be found in polling which shows that Russia is seen as a strong and reliable ally and that the Kremlin's narrative around Ukraine is widely believed.

This is why the BBC matters. Its reporting shapes global understanding of the most important issues that affect us and with which we grapple. The integrity of the World Service reflects on Britain, benefiting our trade, cultural reach and reputation. It is also an exemplar of soft power in undermining those who would rather that the truth does not come out.

I recognise that we live in difficult financial times but, as with all our overcut spending on diplomacy, these are very small sums in the Treasury's accounts. For a marginal saving, we undermine a key institution. Even as we aspire in our rhetoric to be outward looking, our actions tell a different story.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): I am sorry to interrupt the noble Baroness, but we are some way over time and we are pretty tight on timings for this debate. I urge her to immediately conclude her remarks.

Baroness Helic (Con): We hope to be a global nation. We cannot be global without a global voice.

1.17 pm

Lord Hampton (CB) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, as I stand to speak for the first time in this magnificent Chamber, I thank all those who have made my first days here so painless: the doorkeepers, with their remarkable knowledge, my noble friends the Cross-Bench Peers and all those who I have encountered along the way. I particularly thank those numerous people whose endless patience I have tested by asking for directions. The Palace of Westminster has truly tested my sense of direction.

My noble friend Lord Alton rightly raises questions about the impact that cost-cutting will have on the quality of output of the BBC World Service. The BBC World Service always makes me think, perhaps unusually, of my mother-in-law. She has lived as a British national

for many years abroad, a number of which were spent behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. She and my father-in-law would listen religiously to the World Service. It gave them a lifeline in a time of relative isolation. It is a voice that gives comfort to British and non-British alike, piercing borders to offer relatively unbiased information, gaining the trust of millions worldwide.

That trust and the high quality of journalism and reporting that the service delivers have contributed to an extraordinarily valuable brand for both the BBC and Britain, creating an instantly recognisable vehicle to convey Britishness and British values as a form of soft diplomacy worldwide. It truly brings the BBC's core purposes to inform, educate and entertain to a world stage.

I take this opportunity to declare my interest in the "educate" element. As well as being a hereditary Peer, I am a working teacher and head of department in a state secondary school in Hackney. I took my oath three weeks ago and will be managing those two roles alongside each other. I am of course struck by the vast differences between those two halves of my new life, but I am also energised and excited by the opportunity to bring together my learning from both sides and to use what influence I can to improve outcomes for underprivileged children in the UK.

Through my work, I am reminded every day of the challenges young people face and how difficult and sometimes tragic lives can be, but as a teacher, for every story that depresses there are a thousand moments to inspire and cheer. We are a nation that creates outstanding institutions, such as the BBC World Service. I would like to work with noble Lords to consider how we bring more of that national creativity, resourcefulness and ambition to help our younger generations, recognising that these children will one day lead our country, run our industries and be the backbone of our communities. Education is my passion, with an added interest in the creative industries and how we nurture young British talent to develop what is an increasingly powerful and valuable segment of our national market. I look forward to engaging further on these topics in the House.

1.21 pm

Baroness D'Souza (CB): My Lords, I rise to congratulate the noble Lord on a heartfelt, informative and inspiring maiden speech. I am honoured to be able to say a few words, but I have to confess there is precious little information publicly available on our new colleague. We know his full name is John Humphrey Arnott Pakington, 7th Baron Hampton, that he is a photographer and that he was born under the sign of Capricorn. Beyond that, we know almost nothing. I was fortunate enough to have a brief meeting with him yesterday. His conversion from photography to teaching followed a visit to Venice with his wife, during which he saw the light. Seriously, his story is a wonderful one. He clearly loves his job as a teacher in design and technology and as head of department at an academy in east London. Even a short conversation with him revealed his real commitment to young people, and to the role of education and the creative sector in empowering them and driving our economy forward. We are truly

[BARONESS D'SOUZA]

fortunate to have him as a colleague on our Benches. I hope he will forgive me for concluding with a word of advice. If at any time he finds himself assailed with shouts of “Order! Order!”, all he has to do is just sit down. In fact, in this House, when in doubt it is always best to sit down.

I begin by stating the obvious again about the vital role that access to information plays. In its absence, Governments cannot be held to account and citizens are demeaned with false information. This in turn can promote hatred, damage people's health and undermine democracy. Bad information thrives in an information vacuum. The opposite can also be demonstrated. Countries with an independent media thrive better and prove to be more resilient in the face of attacks on democracy and civil liberties. We live in a world where disinformation is flourishing through social media channels.

I would like to give one or two examples of this dilatory impact. The NGO Full Fact is a growing organisation that focuses on tracking down the origins and impact of false information. Recent studies have included the worldwide circulation of untruths about Covid-19. Working with sister organisations in Europe, Full Fact established that the false belief that Muslim communities were somehow receiving preferential treatment was common to all certain European countries. In Spain, there were widespread claims that users' WhatsApp activity would be monitored or censored. In the UK, people attempted to burn 5G towers in the mistaken belief that the network was somehow involved in the spread of depleted immunity to Covid. On a more political level, we know that whole nations can be persuaded to adopt dangerous attitudes towards minorities and enemy nations, entirely without foundation. Currently, this is seen in Russia, and the exponential rise in Russian subscribers to BBC World Service is testament to the yearning for clear, fact-based, impartial journalism in the face of systemic propaganda. During the first five days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were 77 million unique visitors to the BBC English online and almost 200 million views of the live page on Ukraine. Russian visitors to BBC.com increased by 252% in early March. The BBC World Service output was and is perhaps the most effective bulwark against the Kremlin's disinformation, and may yet prove to be a factor in bringing the war to an end.

This is really at the heart of our debate today. The UK boasts a service of incomparable journalistic standards and reach. It is the jewel in the crown of overseas influence, knowledge and trust. As we know, the UK has suffered a crisis of political trust in recent times, which thankfully did not extend to BBC World Service. It is sobering to note that the BBC has a global weekly outreach of 492 million individuals. If ever a nation sought to increase its soft power role, it could do worse than attempt to create a broadcast service along the lines of the BBC, and yet in the past few years the Government have gradually limited the resources needed to maintain this service in its broadest spread and highest standards. The reliance on the licence fee, frozen until 2024 and in the midst of rising costs, created a serious emergency. The recent agreement of additional funds to meet the demands of the Ukrainian

war, although hugely welcome, does not begin to restore services in some local languages, such as Chinese, Hindi, Farsi and Arabic.

It has taken many decades for the BBC to build the trust of its listenership, yet one or two relatively minor government actions can undermine that trust in minutes. Given the extraordinary influence of the BBC, this should be at the front of the Government's mind when undertaking the difficult task of balancing a budget in times of deep scarcity. A final point has been made by William Moy, the chief executive of Full Fact, that the data show that where information sources are growing, there is different content for different consumers. Where information sources are shrinking, the opposite is true, resulting in the fragmentation of societies in terms of the information received. Since democracy relies to a very large extent on a shared reality, the Government, in their deliberations on further cuts, should note this trend.

1.27 pm

Lord McInnes of Kilwinning (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for yet again bringing another important topic before your Lordships' House and I echo the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, in saying that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, often provides a conscience for this House. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, on an excellent maiden speech.

In beginning my remarks, I have to apply a self-correction. I would love to stand here today and say that all the financial resource available to the BBC World Service must continue to increase at a rate such that services can be provided as they always have been. But I am very mindful that in two weeks many of us will be speaking in the debate obtained by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, on the reduction in and availability of ODA. At this time we must be fully engaged with and understanding of the financial situation the country faces.

Today's debate is surely an opportunity to ensure His Majesty's Government fully appreciate the strength of feeling in this House, and that we marshal for the Minister the arguments and ballast he will require in discussions with the Treasury. It is welcome that extra funding for services in Russia and Ukraine has been provided in this calendar year. That is an important sign that the strategic importance of the BBC World Service is understood at government level, and the argument now needs to be pressed home.

My own reasons for maximising the support available for the World Service are twofold. First, I would begin with the promotion of the journalistic values of impartiality and freedom of speech. It is no coincidence that, in the top 10 countries with the highest engagement with the World Service, number six is Iran and number eight is Afghanistan—hugely disproportionate to those countries' sizes but fully registering the importance of the BBC World Service to the people of those countries. So many in Iran and Afghanistan, in a state of brutal dictatorship and authoritarian martial law, rely on the service we provide to ensure that there is an impartial and locally informed voice that can be listened to.

To me, that sums up the vital need for the strong continuation and expansion of the service, focused on the areas where the greatest difference can be made.

Yes, means of engagement may be changing, but I take the point that shortwave radio is still very important and agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, that flexibility is required in providing the service.

The other great strength of the World Service, and why it is so far ahead of its international equivalents such as CNN or Al Jazeera, is its ability both to be authoritative and to work with local journalists. This is not about parachuting in British journalists; it is an absolutely post-colonial vehicle for the expression of British impartiality and values.

That brings me to my second reason for supporting in such strong terms the continuation of the World Service. In a world where we are continually told that Britain is no longer a global influencer, we have here a vehicle for the promotion of British values and the support of human rights that we know to be a success story. In 2021 the integrated review, which is now being updated, described the World Service as one of the UK's "soft power strengths". In the last century, Kofi Annan said the World Service was "perhaps Britain's greatest gift to the world this century".

For me, as a passionate defender of the United Kingdom, the World Service also ensures a tangible expression of Britishness that virtually no one in these islands would disagree with. The integrity of the United Kingdom relies on a shared identity and solidarity. What better means of that than support for a first-class brand through the dual funding of the licence fee and FCDO support through our taxes? Institutions that are admired across the world, such as the World Service, are important internally as much as externally. In a world where we seem to be in a constant phase of self-questioning and self-doubt, I hope that, as Minister for the Union, the Prime Minister will take a keen interest in continuing the support for this great institution.

Finally, I hope my noble friend the Minister can reassure us that he has listened to what we have had to say today. This is about not exempting the World Service from the harsh realities that other areas of aid and development funding are currently facing but ensuring that the vital lifeline and the institutional importance are not lost in the coming years.

1.33 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, I only truly understood and valued the significance of the BBC World Service for Britain's soft power influence around the world when I was our ambassador to the UN from 1990 to 1995. That was the period when Mikhail Gorbachev, rightly or wrongly, attributed the failure of the hard-line coup against him in 1991 to the BBC. It was also the period when the first post-communist Albanian ambassador to the UN arrived in New York speaking perfect English despite having never travelled outside his country before. "How did you do it?", I asked. "Oh, I listened to the BBC every day," he said.

The BBC was influential because of its global network of reporters, because it is fast and accurate and because of its journalistic professionalism; it is never simply an apologist for our Government. Since that time, now 30 years ago, the value of that national asset has increased both overall and relatively, as other feeders of our soft power—our aid programme and the British Council—have been cut back.

Moreover, the need for its qualities in a world awash in misinformation and disinformation, much of it purveyed by authoritarian regimes that are our adversaries, has increased. It is needed to counter the jihadist propaganda of terrorist organisations such as IS and to provide a window on the world to oppressed groups such as Iranian women. The absolutely disgraceful harassment by the regime of BBC Persian's journalists and their families is, in an odd way, a back-handed compliment to the BBC. It is needed, too, to set out the facts during a world crisis such as that in Ukraine. The reporting of BBC journalists such as Lyse Doucet, Jeremy Bowen, Steve Rosenberg and many others is something of which we can all be proud.

I argue that it is a time for doubling down, not cutting back, but that is not what is happening. That is why I greatly welcome the success of my noble friend Lord Alton in securing this debate. I also welcome the contribution of my noble friend Lord Hampton, who put the issues on a much higher level.

I believe the root of the problem is the decision to fund the World Service from the licence fee—a clever trick by a clever Chancellor of the Exchequer, but a fundamental mistake all the same. Why on earth should we expect the BBC to find the right balance between its domestic and overseas services when the latter are an integral part of our foreign policy? Does any other country do that? No. Is it effective and efficient? Not really, since the FCDO is now having to top up the resources available to the BBC's overseas services by an increasing amount each year.

Surely it would be better to go back to the old system of bearing the cost of those overseas services on the FCDO budget, paid for out of general taxation like other parts of our overseas expenditure. Would that not prejudice the impartial reputation of the BBC? I do not believe so. I doubt whether one person in a million among the BBC's viewers and listeners knows or cares a thing about the origin of its resources.

The key to impartiality is the professionalism of the BBC's journalists and the prohibition on any meddling in its editorial freedom, which was as rigorously observed when its resources came from the Foreign Office budget as it is now. So it is for the BBC to decide the allocation of resources and its editorial policy, which is why I will not enter into the argument as to whether it is getting the balance right between digital and audio services.

I am of course aware that this is hardly a propitious moment to be making the case that I have put forward, but the present financial arrangements are neither sustainable nor, I suggest, beneficial to the national interest.

1.37 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for securing this debate, and congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, on his inspiring words about encouraging young talent.

The BBC World Service plays an unmatched role in representing the UK to the world. In truth, it is hard to overstate the importance of the World Service. Through its TV, radio, online and social media platforms it provides news in 41 languages and currently reaches 365 million people every week. The BBC is the world's

[BARONESS WARWICK OF UNDERCLIFFE]

most trusted and best-known international news broadcaster, with the World Service the most trusted international news brand.

In an ever more complex information environment, where many news consumers live in countries with limited press freedom, the BBC World Service is a shining light. In a world increasingly swamped by “fake news”—a world where people can no longer agree on what constitutes reality—the need for fact-based reporting and trusted news sources has never been greater. We saw that during the Covid-19 pandemic. In regions with media restrictions, figures leapt up; visitors to the BBC News Arabic website tripled and BBC News Russian figures doubled, compared with December 2019.

As others have said, the BBC World Service’s provision of trusted information is recognised as being key to the UK’s soft power and in promoting UK democratic values. A recent British Council poll conducted by Ipsos MORI showed that, among younger educated global audiences, the World Service was the best-known institution across all the countries surveyed, and that this was strongly linked to positive views of the UK.

Through its international news services and other, more varied content, the BBC World Service is our voice to the world. That voice enables the exchange of ideas, fosters mutual understanding, and contributes to the UK’s wider objectives in foreign policy, international trade and inward investment.

Maintaining UK soft power and influence matters now more than ever, so the proposed £28.5 million cut to the World Service budget and near 20% job losses are alarming. We all recognise that the BBC is facing a highly competitive global news market and the frozen licence fee is clearly a major challenge, but its decision to cut the World Service is, in my view, a wrong move.

Careful corporate messaging talks about accelerating its digital offering and moving production closer to audiences to drive engagement, but this is not just about transitioning from shortwave to web radio or cutting back on non-news programming. I am grateful to the NUJ’s briefing spelling out the impact of the cuts in stark terms. The reality is a loss of one in five jobs; the closure of Arabic, Persian, Uzbek, Hindi, Chinese and Indonesian radio services, among others; and moving roles to countries where jailing journalists and state suppression of the media are daily risks.

The impact will be profound. I will reinforce an example raised by the noble Lord, Lord Alton. BBC Persian has had a key role in reporting the women-led, anti-regime protests across Iran. Heavy censorship by the authorities means that these are not covered by local media. Closing the radio service will mean that for 17 hours a day BBC Persian has no scheduled live broadcast, and the NUJ warns that that space may be filled by a Saudi-funded channel. Yes, BBC Persian reaches half its audience through digital and online platforms, but the Iranian Government have a habit of shutting down the internet in times of crisis so those platforms could become inaccessible.

Similarly, in Africa, where data is hugely expensive or connectivity unreliable, or where internet shutdowns are frequent, live radio remains the most popular and

trusted medium. Again, the BBC’s Africa services are able to ask questions that local stations cannot. Its staff say that moving services to a digital-first model in Nairobi or Lagos will hinder their ability to cover sensitive stories.

The view that a truthful approach to news is a core British value is due in no small part to these news services, delivered over decades through political turmoil, revolution and natural disasters. The World Service’s historic role as a truthful broadcaster has helped to promote democracy around the globe. Eliminating broadcasts in some of the world’s most spoken languages will be deeply damaging to the World Service’s reach and influence, and thereby to the UK’s global standing.

If we want to maintain our global soft power and serve democracy worldwide, weakening our international voice as one response to the BBC’s funding shortfall seems a very high price to pay. Earlier this year this House recommended that the Government commit to safeguarding and enhancing the work of the BBC World Service. The Government’s response then was not at all reassuring, so I ask the Minister again if he will make that commitment today.

1.42 pm

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick (CB): My Lords, my interests in the register as a BBC pensioner and a former head of public affairs for the BBC are well known. I thank my great friend, the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for his persistence in driving us towards decent thinking and perpetual challenge.

I love the World Service. I increasingly listen to it on the digital radio in my car rather than domestic news services, largely because we are confronted day in and day out by international events that we need to understand better. I enjoy the dialogue on the World Service and the perception of its news content far more than I do Radio 4 or Radio 5 Live, but that may just be me getting wiser at the same time as I get older.

Not only do I love the World Service now, I loved it as a child born and brought up in the north-west of England. I was also brought up in the Caribbean—in Montego Bay, Jamaica, so your Lordships know where I am from in case that question is asked. My parents would listen every single day to the World Service. The radio would come on multiple times, with my mother in particular always tuning it to ensure that we heard what London had to say.

I had the joy in 2004 of going to the north of Nigeria, to the incredible sand city of Kano, where I listened to the Hausa service at 1.30 pm and at 6.30 pm, when literally hundreds of thousands of people would gather around short-wave radios to hear what London had to say, in Hausa, about the reality of events in Nigeria. To take the point that the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, made so well, that is exactly why digital services simply will not serve so many communities that rely on real radio. They need real radio for their ears, as well as for their knowledge, understanding and lives. We have said so much in this debate about countries which, yes, profoundly matter—Iran, China, Russia, Ukraine and Taiwan—but I have mentioned Nigeria, where elections are coming up in February. That country will have the third-largest population in

the world within another 20 years. It is essential to maintain language services to countries that we may often disregard as less significant but which are vital to our economic prospects as well as to global stability.

The issue of the £28.5 million cut to the BBC's services is a dumb disaster made in Downing Street. It is a dumb disaster because the decision to cut funds—I realise some of it is historical—but also to restrain funding reflects on what is a complete contradiction between what Downing Street says is its desire for global Britain to have influence, presence and significance, and its willingness to observe restraints on those very institutions that give the most effective presence of global Britain.

While we are on the matter of context, the Minister is from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. His own department wasted £120 million on Unboxed, a ridiculous festival in 170 towns and cities around the country, promising that 66 million people would attend in its crazy pursuit of an effective Brexit. Well, no effective Brexit has happened and no effective attendance at the festival happened. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee of another place said that the 283,000 people who benefited from that £120 million was a shameful abuse of public resources.

As the Minister comes to respond later, could he look around government, especially his own department, at what other trashy projects are being put in place in planning for the next election in the next two years to showcase Brexit as having been a good deal for Britain, when everybody knows that it has been a tragedy of catastrophic mismanagement and foolishness? What we need to do is to extract money from wasted parts of government and ensure that the BBC World Service is well sustained and maintained, and that its languages are protected.

1.47 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, I declare an interest in that my wife, Caroline Thomson, was deputy director of the World Service in the 1990s.

This has been a very good debate, and what is impressive about it is the very strong support from all sides of the House for the World Service. I particularly pay tribute to the speeches of the noble Baronesses, Lady Browning and Lady Helic, and the noble Lord, Lord McInnes, because it is important that this cross-party support is sustained. I also put on record what I know to be the case: despite his involvement in the coalition the noble Lord, Lord McNally, was a stalwart defender of the BBC at every opportunity that he had.

I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, on his maiden speech. His arrival in the House does not quite convince me of the virtues of the hereditary principle but at least he will speak from a real-world experience of education. That will be of enormous value to the House.

I have some brief remarks to add to the excellent speeches we have heard. I support the World Service because I am a patriot and believe in Britain. I believe that the World Service is one of the things that makes Great Britain really great. It has phenomenal global reach: two-thirds of the 489 million people the BBC reaches are, incidentally, reached through foreign

language-speaking services, a point to which we return. It is a sphere in which we are genuinely world leading, in that phrase overused by previous Prime Ministers. This is world-leading Britain and we must not sacrifice it. It is a tremendous tribute to the quality of the journalism offered there, often by people such as the Iranians based in London, whose families have a terrible time back home because of their commitment to honesty and truth.

It is essential that services modernise with the times. This is why the BBC, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary, has been a tremendous success: it has modernised. I remember that, in the 1990s, there was a great controversy about the proposal of John Birt, now the noble Lord, Lord Birt, to merge the World Service newsroom with the domestic one to create a single newsroom. A lot of people thought that this was dreadful, but in fact it has been a great success and it means that, domestically, we benefit from the network of World Service journalists around the world.

The BBC now justifies what it is doing on the basis of the need for it to become digital—it is part of a digital strategy. I am obviously sympathetic to that; it is certainly the right thing for the domestic audience. But I talked to someone who worked for the World Service for years and he was extremely cautious about the abandonment of language services happening as a result of this shift to a digital strategy, particularly given the capacity of authoritarian regimes to block online delivery when it is most needed. I should like to hear the Minister's views on this very real point and why the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is not making special efforts to ensure that foreign language services in countries such as Iran continue.

I do not know whether the Minister will be proud to make his speech today. It seems to me that the extra money could easily be found to pay for the continuance of these language services. If I wanted to be nasty and partisan, I would say that it is a tiny fraction of the money that the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, allegedly banked as a result of her VIP contract with the Government. Therefore, the Minister has to argue strongly for why he believes that this is all in the interests of the World Service and why we should not be doing more to protect it.

1.52 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, the British Broadcasting Corporation is the best broadcasting corporation in the world. It is a world leader, reaching almost 500 million people every week, more than any other international broadcaster. Time and again in this excellent debate, noble Lords have said that it is the world's most trusted broadcaster, with CNN, or whichever one comes next, way behind. It has 43 languages and 75 news bureaux around the world; it is amazing. BBC programmes and global news services are more important than ever, and we are more connected than ever in the world, but at the same time we have a greater spread of disinformation and false news, so the need for trusted broadcasting is greater than ever. It is so important that the BBC World Service enhances the UK's standing and reputation around the world.

[LORD BILIMORIA]

In 2021, the BBC commissioned research and found that it is the best-known British cultural export, providing soft power, as many noble Lords have said; it is the most trusted news brand among both mass and influential audiences; and business leaders are likelier to invest in the UK, use British goods and suppliers and visit the UK as a result of the BBC.

The Soft Power 30 2019 rankings cited the BBC World Service as one of the two British institutions that are key to Britain's soft power. The knock-on benefits are phenomenal, including doing business with the UK. As a former international student, president of UKCISA and co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Students, I know that it inspired me, and it inspires international students to come and study here. By the way, any talk by the Government of reducing the number of international students is nonsense. We need to increase the number of international students from 600,000 to 1 million.

Of course, the BBC is also important in promoting what Britain has always been famous for historically: its sense of fairness, integrity and impartiality. It is one of the three elements of soft power that are above all others, the other two being Premier League football and the Royal Family—much thanks to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and, now, King Charles III.

The World Service also highlighted in its review that its reach has grown significantly, by 42%. In business, if something is growing, I put more money behind it; I do not cut money from it. If audiences are growing, that shows a need for it; it shows that the Government's investment has paid off. Of course, and as other noble Lords have mentioned, it has also shown that, in this time of crisis around the world and with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we need the BBC; the Russians need the BBC; the Ukrainians need the BBC. The BBC has been adaptable—it has launched a new TikTok channel; it is reaching the people who need it desperately.

We know that the BBC is funded chiefly by the licence fee, and it is committed to providing £254 million of funding to the World Service. In the bigger picture, that is a tiny amount of money. It is then topped up by grants in aid from the FCDO. The BBC has seen its income reduced by 30% in real terms in the past decade, but it is still managing to do all this. It has a freeze for the next two years. What sort of business thinking is this? What sort of cost savings are these? This is not at all cost-saving; it is being penny-wise and pound-foolish. Some 73% of the world does not have a free press or has only a partially free press. Then there are all the financial challenges and, on top of that, job losses—382 job losses, for an institution that is trusted, impartial and needed more than ever.

In October, Andrew Mitchell, a Minister in the FCDO, said:

“The FCDO strongly supports the BBC's role in bringing high-quality, impartial news to audiences around the world.”

In India, services have expanded to four new languages: Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi and Telugu. India is now the largest country in audience terms, with almost 60 million people reached by the BBC.

Cost-benefit? Value for money? This is nonsense. From the £5 billion income that the BBC receives, we are now talking about cutting £25 million. I look back to my childhood in India when I watched my grandfather listening to the BBC every morning. It is imprinted in me. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, mentioned trust. The BBC is trusted. It is the best broadcasting corporation in the world by far.

1.58 pm

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Lab): My Lords, I welcome this important debate on the importance of the BBC World Service. I share everyone's concerns about the impact of cuts on the services, so I thank my friend the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for introducing the debate. I also pay tribute to our new Member, the noble Lord, Lord Hampton. It is rather wonderful to have a teacher who is at the coalface here in the House to remind us of the importance of education and keeping that well funded too.

I put on record my interest as the director of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute. As a human rights lawyer who is in contact with human rights activists and lawyers around the world in straitened circumstances, I go to places where they talk about how important it is to be able to hear what is happening in other parts of the world and to know what good government can look like. An example is the women who have learned so much about women's rights and that they do not have to live imperilled lives—lives subjected to violence—because of what they hear on the World Service.

I will tell a similar story to that of the noble Lord, Lord Hannay. I recently evacuated women judges and lawyers from Afghanistan, and, having spent time with them since, I have remarked on how good their English is. They got their English up to speed by listening to the World Service in Pashto, Dari and the other languages in which we have been transmitting in Afghanistan. This is now being closed down by the Taliban. However, in the years after the last removal of the Taliban, these women were learning law, and the World Service provided them with an understanding of both English and the importance of women's rights.

We know why media freedom matters so much. In the last year up until now, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 63 journalists have been killed across the world and 300 have been detained. We know that media is being crushed in so many countries; the statistics were read out by one of the previous speakers. We know that to report freely on matters of public interest is a crucial indicator of democracy. I am sorry that the Minister has left the Chamber, but I hope he will be told that I think the Government should take some pride in having created a media freedom project when Jeremy Hunt was Foreign Secretary. He did that alongside his equivalent in Canada. The two countries came together to create the Media Freedom Coalition because of their concerns about attacks on media freedom worldwide. The creation of that coalition has really developed—I can tell noble Lords this from my own experience, because the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute runs the secretariat for a high-level legal panel, and we have been doing an incredible amount of work on this. There are now

51 countries in the coalition, and we should remember that this initiative was started by Britain and its Foreign Office.

So why is there this contradiction that, in the very area in which we are supposed to be trying to play a major part in the world on media freedom, we are not protecting one of the major influencers that we have, which is the BBC World Service? The Foreign Office should try to get this right. Like others, I too would like to see a return to the grant in aid that used to be made for the World Service, as it is the only way you can really protect it, given what is currently happening with the funding of the BBC.

One of the things that came out of the Media Freedom Coalition—and for which we had argued—was the creation of emergency visas for journalists at risk. I regret to say that this country has not quite embraced that yet, but many other countries have, including Canada. Recently, we have seen the Czech Republic giving 600 emergency visas to young journalists from Russia who have had to flee because Russia has passed a law which says that, if anybody suggests that there is war taking place with Ukraine, they are subject to imprisonment. We have already seen journalists being imprisoned.

There will be a contradiction if we do not fund the World Service properly. I remind noble Lords that, sometimes, you can know the cost of everything and the value of nothing—that is precisely what we are seeing here.

2.03 pm

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, I also warmly welcome this debate on the importance of the BBC World Service and congratulate my noble friend Lord Alton on his characteristically superb introduction. I also congratulate my noble friend Lord Hampton on his inspiring maiden speech, which was clearly from a very experienced teacher.

In my short time, I will focus on relevant issues in North Korea, Burma/Myanmar, Nigeria and Armenia. I travelled to North Korea with my noble friend Lord Alton on three occasions and strongly supported his campaign to persuade a reluctant Foreign Office and BBC of the importance of opening a BBC Korean service. Ten years after our first visit to Pyongyang, the UN established a commission of inquiry, chaired by the distinguished Australian judge, Justice Michael Kirby. In 2014, it published a damning report, concluding that the human rights violations perpetrated by the regime amount to “crimes against humanity” and detailed

“an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought” and of

“the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and association.”

Seven years ago, the BBC began broadcasts to the Korean peninsula. Justice Michael Kirby had said BBC broadcasts would be a great encouragement to its beleaguered people. Indeed, breaking the information blockade in places such as North Korea is a lifeline to people living in repressive isolation. It also underlines our commitment to Article 19 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights to ensure unimpeded free access to information and news. It is surely something which we should continue, even in the most challenging financial times.

I turn to another very dark country, Burma—or Myanmar. I use the name Burma, because our friends there prefer it. For half a century, Burma was ruled by a succession of military dictatorships which kept the country closed, the people repressed and democracy in chains. Many times in the past 20 years, I have travelled across borders to support our partners with the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, in the Shan, Chin and Kachin states, with aid and advocacy. Last year, there were genuine democratic elections, but that period of reform was shattered when the military again illegally seized power in a coup on 1 February 2021, imprisoning the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratically elected leaders, and killing others. More than 12,000 remain in jail today, and many are in hiding. In the ethnic areas, civilians endure airstrikes and ground attacks from the military, destroying homes, churches and schools, and killing or displacing thousands of people. Only last week, Burmese troops torched the home village of Burma’s Cardinal Charles Bo, killing two civilians, including one child.

Many people in Burma, including pro-democracy activists, ethnic peoples hiding in the jungle, and civilians living in fear, repeatedly emphasise how much they rely on the BBC’s broadcasts as a source of reliable and accurate information, encouragement and hope that the outside world has not forgotten them. The BBC’s Burmese service has a long tradition of which it can be proud, and which it should be given the resources to continue. We are living at a time when cuts have been made in many areas of public spending; we all understand that. But that should not mean cutting lifelines on which so many people in different parts of the world living under dictatorship and fighting for freedom rely—nor should it mean cutting the United Kingdom’s reputation as a major deployer of soft power in the struggle between open societies and autocracies. I look forward to the Minister’s response to this debate, and in particular any assurances he may be able to provide as to the future of the BBC Korea and Burmese services, which provide such a vital service to two of the most closed countries in the world.

I turn briefly to Nigeria. With temerity, I have to express a concern. I have made numerous visits to Nigeria—twice this year included—and the atrocities clearly meet the legal definitions of crimes against humanity, and even genocide. None the less, they continue to receive very little attention from the international community and from media, including the BBC World Service. Media reporting is crucial to shine light on the atrocities and ultimately to engage the international community on the issue. Absence of such reporting enables misinformation and disinformation—including the Nigerian and UK Governments’ failure to recognise, at least in public, the horrific seriousness of the situation—to be broadcast unchallenged by the truth. Many thousands of civilians have been massacred in recent years. InterSociety reports that 4,020 Christians have been killed between January and October this year, and 3,800 abducted in 2021.

[BARONESS COX]

Many Muslims have also been killed. The killings and abductions continue, but there has been virtually no reporting by the BBC.

Briefly, on Armenia, I and others are deeply concerned about apparent bias reflected in the failure adequately to report continuing conflict perpetrated by Azerbaijan upon Armenians in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. This includes the refusal to report Azerbaijan's war crimes and crimes against humanity, with violations of the ceasefire agreement reflected in the continuing detention of Armenian prisoners, the killings and atrocities performed by Azeri soldiers, and the destruction of sacred sites. The inadequacy of the BBC World Service in reporting the sustained and very serious perpetration of atrocities by Azerbaijan encourages continuation with impunity.

I hope that it is clear that I have a profound respect, indeed admiration, for the professionalism of the BBC World Service, and I strongly support continuation of funding for its work. I hope that it will highlight some of those areas which I and other noble Lords have mentioned need coverage.

2.09 pm

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on securing this debate. It is not the first that he has secured on the subject of the World Service and I am sure it will not be the last. I also welcome the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, and congratulate him on his maiden speech. He said that education is his passion; education is also my passion, and I look forward to hearing his contributions to debates on that subject going forward.

The World Service is an institution that I have supported and worked with for many years; it is one for which I have the greatest respect and admiration as the world's most trusted and best-known international news broadcaster. It has had to adapt to the effects of cuts—politically motivated cuts—in funding over a period of more than a decade but has adapted to the challenges that that has presented with a determination to maintain the high standards and long reach for which it is renowned worldwide.

When its grant in aid from the then FCO ended, it was widely predicted that the move to licence-fee funding would see a reduction in services and quality of programmes; yet, while to a limited extent the first happened, the second did not, which has been due to the hugely talented and dedicated staff who work for the World Service. Today, its output can be said to be in a good place, with a total reach, as other noble Lords have said, of 365 million each week—a remarkable increase of 50% since 2016.

However, the World Service has achieved that despite, not because of, government. A succession of Tory Administrations have undermined the BBC as an institution, regarding it as insufficiently supportive of government policies. The contempt in which the corporation was held by the Johnson Administration reached its zenith with what I can only describe as the caricature appointment of Nadine Dorries—a long-time outspoken opponent of the BBC—as Culture Secretary. She regularly accused it of lacking impartiality in its

programming, so it is somewhat ironic—in fact, it is much more serious than that—that, since her departure, the BBC has appointed a former GB News editorial director as its director of news programmes. Research commissioned by the BBC last year found that the organisation is associated around the world with distinctive British values of fairness, integrity and impartiality. What price those values now?

The World Service always keeps parliamentarians up to date with events in the world's most troubled areas with its detailed briefings, both online and in person. Two days ago, I was privileged to attend an event organised jointly by the British Group of the IPU and the World Service to show a BBC Eye documentary entitled "Occupied". That was a stunning secretly filmed record of life under occupation in Kherson that shed light on how the war in Ukraine impacts civilians and day-to-day life. It was very moving and was backed up by World Service journalists giving us their own experiences, as well as a visiting Ukrainian MP giving a first-hand account of life in her country.

Despite providing a small amount of additional funding following the Russian invasion, the Government have again made a political decision to cut the BBC's funding, with no increases over the next three years. Following a strategic review of the World Service, the BBC's reaction to that has been to cut its budget by £28.5 million a year from next year, resulting in almost 20% of all staff being made redundant. Whatever else they may be, those staff are not redundant; they are very much needed by many people living in conditions that we can only imagine.

Let us be absolutely clear where the blame lies: it lies fairly and squarely at the Government's door. It can be argued, as indeed the National Union of Journalists does convincingly in a comprehensive briefing sent to noble Lords for today's debate, that the cuts might have been more carefully targeted. One example mentioned by other noble Lords is the cutting of the Persian radio service for 17 hours a day. That will certainly be welcomed by the Iranian regime and will leave a void that may well be filled by a Saudi-funded channel. The BBC has been forced to make those cuts as a result of a Government who—no matter what the Minister may say in his reply—clearly do not value the BBC. In the words of the National Union of Journalists,

"These cuts were forced upon it by Conservative ministers who dislike the national broadcaster more than they value the national interest."

Many in the Chamber today—and, I dare say, much further afield—will endorse that statement.

As the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, said, the essential work of the World Service must be funded directly by the FCDO, as was the case prior to 2011. If I can nudge my noble friend on our Front Bench, I hope that that is a policy that the next Labour Government will feel able to take forward. It should be a given that our Government fully appreciate the huge asset that the World Service is, both to the BBC and to the UK. It should, but it will require a change of Government to bring that about.

2.15 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I start by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Alton. He has been persistent in support of the BBC World Service and I congratulate him on securing this debate today. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, on his excellent maiden speech. I think we are going to hear a lot more from him, despite his school duties. It is a good job that we spend a lot of time here in the evening, so we can look forward to that.

The UK has had a pivotal role in promoting the rule of law and democratic values globally, through multilateral institutions such as the United Nation. We played a leading role in establishing the UN's sustainable development goals, which established a reputation for the United Kingdom as a trusted partner across the world. Our influence is not restricted to relationships with Governments: our renowned institutions, such as the BBC World Service and our universities, as well as the export of music and other cultural assets, have given us huge soft power that we should not underestimate.

Many noble Lords have heard me say repeatedly that the ingredients of a thriving democracy are not limited to parliaments and parliamentarians. Civil society organisations, such as women's groups, charities, faith groups, trade unions and other organised communities, have all demonstrated their role in defending democracy and human rights. When nations fail in their most important task of providing safety, security and freedom for their people, it is always civil society that leaps first to their defence. A vital part of strengthening our ties with civil society is the support we give through the provision of free, independent information.

As we have heard in the debate, the BBC is associated around the world with distinctive British values of fairness, integrity and impartiality. As noble Lords have said in the debate, 73% of the world does not have a free press, or has only a partially free press, and the BBC is essential in fighting the growth of disinformation and fake news. The World Service's role in providing essential, trusted and accurate information has been highlighted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. When that invasion took place, audiences of the Russian website more than tripled and audiences of the Ukrainian website more than doubled. In the face of Russian attempts to block international news content, the BBC stepped up its efforts to reach audiences, as we have heard, including by launching new TikTok channels.

It is really important that we underline our soft power activity, particularly the BBC, which, as the right reverend Prelate highlighted, is an integral part of the integrated review, the strategy, bringing these things together. How are we going to support civil society, which the integrated review stressed, if we do not have that soft power, if we do not have the World Service? Let me just say that

"the BBC World Service provides just that: a world service and a world-class service. It is something that we are, and can continue to be, very proud of, particularly in these dark circumstances of today ... Global audience measure data for last year demonstrates that it is the top-rated international broadcaster for trustworthiness, reliability and depth of coverage."

Those words may sound familiar to the Minister. He said them in a debate on 10 March. They are worth repeating—I know he is busy on his mobile phone at the moment—as they should reflect the priority of his Government. He told us in March that any decisions on financing the BBC World Service will reflect

"the importance and respect with which we hold that organisation."—[*Official Report*, 10/3/2022; col. 1551.]

As my noble friend Lord Stevenson said, 75% of the funding for the World Service comes out of the licence fee, which is a regressive taxation issue. There is pressure on that, but in the last spending review the Government agreed that investment in the World Service would be maintained at £94.4 million per annum for the next three years. In addition, as the Minister will undoubtedly say, the Government announced £4.1 million of emergency funding in March to support World Service journalism in Russia and Ukraine.

As we have heard, much of the funding the World Service receives from the FCDO is classed as ODA—we know what has been happening to that, with the cap of 0.5% and its implications for our policies to support the SDGs in countries in Africa and elsewhere. It is really important that we reflect on these impacts through the integrated review.

As my noble friend Lord Stevenson reminded us, the licence fee settlement resulted in a freeze in the first two years, which means that the BBC has to absorb inflation—necessitating, as it put it, tough choices. It must reduce licence fee spending on international news services, including the World Service, by £28.5 million by April 2023. This is at a time when the spread of disinformation is increasing and the need for trusted news and information has never been greater.

The BBC says that it is engaging constructively with the FCDO on future funding to minimise more damaging cost-saving decisions in the pipeline for next year. Earlier this month, BBC Director-General Tim Davie said that the level of future investment in the World Service was a strategic decision for the UK Government and the FCDO. Does the Minister agree with that? Will he commit that the planned update to the integrated review will consider the impact that cuts to the World Service will have on the UK's influence?

We have heard that the World Service will become more digital. Digital first will result in some broadcast services ending—we have heard about the Arabic and Persian radio. This is particularly galling given the Iranian situation, where we have seen protesters experiencing brutal repression.

A strategy being developed to reflect the changing needs of people sounds fine, but I want to know what assessment the FCDO has made with the BBC of the pattern of changing needs—not only how people have changed how they access media but how totalitarian Governments may limit access so that they can stop people listening to such things as the BBC World Service and trace whether they are doing so through the internet. These are fundamental questions that need to be answered. As my noble friend Lord Liddle said, we have heard across all parties in this debate how we respect and value the BBC and its World Service.

2.24 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park) (Con): My Lords, I begin by thanking my noble friend Lord Alton for tabling this important debate. I thank other noble Lords for their insightful contributions, and I will try to respond to all the points raised. Before I do, I echo the remarks of other noble Lords in paying tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, on a beautifully delivered and very impressive maiden speech. Like others, I look forward to his contributions in the weeks, months and years to come.

In his Motion, the noble Lord touches on the important theme of soft power and how we project UK values overseas. It sounds innocuous, but with democracy under attack—as a number of noble Lords have pointed out and provided examples of—and disinformation all around us, we cannot underestimate the impact of our soft power, nor take it for granted. It is fundamental to our international identity as an open, trustworthy nation. The UK has powerful tools to deploy in this regard. We have a vast and, I believe, brilliant diplomatic network, an education system geared to attract the very best minds, an arts sector offering a global reach and partners of huge international standing who can showcase our talents and values to the world. Of course, the BBC is a critical example of such international reach and one of the UK's great national institutions. It should be a source of pride to us all.

Over the past 100 years, the BBC has touched the lives of almost everyone in the UK and made a unique contribution to our cultural heritage and identity. The BBC World Service in particular has made it one of the UK's best-known international brands and, as others have said, one of the great UK exports. This year, as we have heard, the World Service celebrates its 90th anniversary, having grown over the decades to become the world's largest and most trusted international broadcaster. It is top rated for reliability and depth of coverage, providing accurate and impartial news, analysis and discussion in some 42 languages to 365 million people every week, in every corner of the world. Last year, in our integrated review—as the noble Lord, Lord Collins, pointed out—the UK Government stated that the BBC's foreign language services are part of what makes the UK a “soft power superpower”. As he also said, no other country has anything like it.

Incidentally, the noble Lord remarked on my use of my mobile phone. Your Lordships can see these brilliant people in the Box; like all Ministers I rely on an often-invisible team of officials who provide reliable and accurate information. I would love to pretend that my mind is encyclopaedic, but I rely on these wonderful people to ensure that I do not make any mistakes, and I was checking a fact on my mobile phone. I was listening with real care to the points that the noble Lord made, and I agree very much with almost everything he said. I share his views on the value of the organisation we are debating today—

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): They were your words.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): That is another reason why I agreed strongly with the noble Lord—he was quoting me.

The UK is a fierce champion of media freedom and a proud member of the Media Freedom Coalition, which the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, rightly cited, and these values are reflected globally in the World Service's broadcasts. That coalition now has some 50 members, and the UK has been among the most active of them. We co-chaired the coalition in 2019, and we have and continue to fund aspects of it, not least the secretariat. Like the noble Baroness, we recognise the value in that coalition.

Whether debunking disinformation or countering harmful state narratives, the World Service reports on topics that other media outlets simply will not touch. For example, its reporting continues to play a crucial role in challenging the Kremlin's corrupted narrative, a point that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, made in his brilliant opening remarks. I can tell him that one of the facts provided by my team in the Box is that 4.7 million Russian viewers per week dipped into these services in 2021-22. So, it is a valuable resource—more than that, it is a critical resource of accurate information. Its unique, impartial lens allows it to speak to vulnerable and underrepresented audiences around the globe. The World Service promotes a free media, free expression and journalistic excellence. It undermines biased reporting and embodies our democratic values. That is real power. As the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, said, it is the jewel in the crown in so many respects.

The World Service was funded by grant in aid from the Government until 2016, when it moved under the mantle of the licence fee. I believe that decision was made in 2010. I will come on to the FCDO role in all of this. The noble Lord, Lord Hastings, suggested that the FCDO has engaged in spending on trashy Brexit propaganda—I may have got the wording wrong, but those were the sentiments. I do not think the FCDO has funded any such propaganda, certainly not trashy propaganda. I do not believe that is something my department engages in, but if he has any examples, I would be interested to hear them.

Since the decision was made to move to the licence fee, the FCDO has provided the World Service with nearly £470 million in funding through the World 2020 programme. Since that programme launched, as we heard from many noble Lords, 365 million people have tuned in weekly. That is a 40% increase since 2016, which was the start of the FCDO-funded World 2020 programme. The two are linked. It is hard to know exactly how strong that link is, but it is hard to believe that there is no such link.

This has allowed for expansion, including 12 new languages, mainly across Africa and Asia, and enhancements to existing language services including English, Russian, Arabic and Thai. The funding has helped with digital transformation and supported countering disinformation. In response to comments made by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, the FCDO has committed to maintain the same level of flat cash funding of £283 million over the spending review period of 2022 to 2025, which equates to

£94.4 million a year, of which £76.9 million is ODA and £17.5 million is non-ODA. None of that is licence fee funding; it all comes from the FCDO.

As the noble Lord, Lord Collins, pointed out, we also provided an additional £1.44 million in ODA funding this year, alongside £2.65 million from the DCMS, for Ukrainian and Russian-language services and to support the wider World Service in countering Russian disinformation. These arrangements remain in place, with the licence fee funding the majority of the World Service from a commitment of £254 million per annum.

The noble Baroness, Lady Cox, made some very powerful points. She particularly referenced Nigeria. Another batch of information I was able to harvest from my colleagues in the Box tells me that the FCDO specifically funds services in Igbo, Pidgin and Yoruba in Nigeria through the World 2020 programme. That is a commitment that we take seriously and will continue.

However, as noble Lords have recognised, we have to recognise the challenging fiscal environment in which the world finds itself. The BBC, just like households and businesses across the UK, is having to make tough financial decisions and identify savings across all its priorities. As part of that process, it has announced its intention to become a more “digital first” organisation. That has meant changes in the way some services are delivered, which I recognise has raised questions about what this means for global audiences in practical terms.

First, to clarify, the recent announcements confirm that under these proposals, there will be no language closures across the World Service. Audiences will retain access to all 42 language services, but increasingly through digital platforms, which are in any case becoming the most popular mode of engagement. I will come back to that in a second. Yes, the BBC has taken the decision to close 10 radio services by March 2023, including BBC Persian and BBC Arabic—points made by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, and the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins. However, in this digital age, radio audiences are shrinking, with no indication at all that the trend will reverse. In an example cited throughout this debate, in Iran, only 1% of the BBC’s total weekly audience of 13.8 million get BBC news solely via radio. The other 99% use BBC Persian on TV and online, both of which will continue, as with BBC Arabic.

Therefore it is unrealistic to suggest, as some have, that the Iranian Government are celebrating this development. The BBC continues to provide not far off 100% of the content that it has been providing, certainly to nearly 100% of the people who have enjoyed and consumed BBC News. For this reason, the BBC has committed to increase investment in digital services, reflecting how audiences engage with their services.

Specifically on Iran, a number of noble Lords asked what we are doing in response to recent threats to Iranian journalists. On 11 November, the Foreign Secretary summoned the Iranian chargé d’affaires, Iran’s most senior representative here in the UK, regarding a whole series of very acute, serious threats made against journalists living here in the UK. The Foreign Secretary made it clear that we do not tolerate

such threats to life or intimidation of any kind towards journalists or any individual living in the UK. The UK ambassador has spoken with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on four occasions about their complaints of media reporting of the protests in the UK. Like everyone who has spoken on this issue today, we absolutely condemn the Iranian authorities’ crackdown on protesters, journalists and internet freedom and continue to raise these issues with Iran at every appropriate opportunity.

The BBC has set up new units in London, Delhi and Lagos to counter disinformation, producing award-winning investigative documentaries and impactful stories on modern slavery, the rights of women and girls, and local elections. In response to comments made by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and the noble Lord, Lord Alton, a new China global unit will produce content focused on exposing the challenges and realities currently facing China and its fight for global influence, so we are not backing away from attempting to use this extraordinary tool that we are discussing today to try to influence proceedings and affairs in China.

A dynamic Africa content hub will commission and deliver more digital content for all 12 African language services and will provide coverage of the continent for the rest of the BBC. The BBC has said that these decisions will mean less reliance on local syndication partnerships, more ownership of content and greater freedom to broadcast on its own channels. It has also provided assurances that the World Service will continue to serve audiences in need, ensuring continued access to vital news.

We recognise, as did the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, that some decisions relating to the BBC’s operations will have impacts on jobs; we have already received and responded to questions from the public and both Houses on this subject. It is important to note that the BBC is operationally and editorially independent from the Government, which I think we all value and appreciate. That said, the funding that is currently enjoyed by the BBC is protected until 2025 as per the spending review settlements. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State of the DCMS has made it clear to the BBC that it should continue to make a substantive investment from the licence fee into the World Service to ensure that it continues to effectively reflect the UK, its culture and values in English and through its language services.

The FCDO is working with the DCMS on a regular basis to figure out how we can protect the BBC World Service interests in this transition that is happening. There is a very clear recognition—I reiterate it here—that we understand the value of the BBC World Service. Nothing that anyone has said in this debate so far about its value on so many different levels in any way parts from the position of the UK Government or me as a Minister, and that will be reflected in whatever arrangements are made going forward.

Lord Liddle (Lab): I accept all the noble Lord is saying about how the Government value the World Service, but does he think that the withdrawal of the radio service in Persian is the right thing to do at the present time?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): As I said earlier, only 1% of the audience in Iran get their information via the radio, while 99% get it via TV, digital and so on. It is exaggerated and, in the context of the BBC overall having to find ways to live within its means and take preparatory steps for the years to come, it is not fundamentally a disastrous decision but is pretty peripheral. Obviously, you must see these things in the round, but the overwhelming impulse of all of us, including the Government, must be to protect the value of the BBC World Service. That does not mean delivering the same content in the same way going forward. The world is changing.

We trust that the BBC World Service is evolving just as its audience is evolving, and that it continues to provide information and inspiration to a vast and growing global audience, as a powerful expression of the UK's soft power influence in the world. For as long as I am a Minister in this Government—and I do not believe that my position differs from that of colleagues—there will be a continued recognition of and support for this wonderfully British and successful tool that we are very lucky to enjoy in this country.

2.40 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, it is clear from the Minister's speech that he passionately believes in the BBC World Service. I hope that he will take our rich debate today to his ministerial colleagues as they reflect on the gap between resources and the ability of the BBC World Service to fulfil its mandate, not least to the 40% of the world without digital access. It may well be true but, compared with the number who listen from digital platforms, which can so easily be closed by regimes such as that in Iran, there are still 1.6 million people who listen by radio to the BBC Persian service.

I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Hampton on his maiden speech. I knew his late father; we became firm friends when he was a spokesman on Northern Irish issues and I was a spokesman on Northern Irish issues in another place. At the age of 18, his son invited me to speak at his school about the importance of getting involved in politics. I am very glad that I did not entirely put him off. It was wonderful to hear him today.

The noble Baroness, Lady Browning, said that we must look at this with fresh eyes, particularly the funding model. The noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, said that the World Service is our greatest gift from Britain to the world. It should be a gift that goes on giving. The noble Lord, Lord McNally, said that "London calling" still means so much around the world. My noble friend Lady Coussins emphasised the importance of the BBC World Service in moments of jeopardy. It should not be a binary choice between radio and digital. "A voice for the voiceless," said the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans. The noble Baroness, Lady Helic, said that once it is closed, it cannot easily be restored. The Minister referred to my noble friend Lady D'Souza saying that it is the jewel in our crown.

The noble Lord, Lord McInnes, said that our new Prime Minister should engage with the future of the World Service. Given the noble Lord's previous role in Downing Street, I hope that he will draw Downing Street's attention to our debate today. My noble friend

Lord Hannay said that it is time for doubling down, not for cutting back. The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, said that it is crucial to our soft power, and for bettering understanding around the world. My noble friend Lord Hastings said that 40% of the world does not have access to digital services. He particularly talked about his own experiences in Nigeria.

The noble Lord, Lord Liddle, talked about the crucial importance of foreign language services, while my noble friend Lord Bilimoria said that "BBC" actually stands for "best broadcasting corporation". He is right that it is a world leader and trusted, and that we should not be penny wise and pound foolish. The noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of The Shaws, said that the BBC World Service has a crucial role in promoting human rights and media freedom, and that we should not evaluate everything only by its cost but also by its value. My noble friend Lady Cox, with whom I travelled on three occasions to North Korea, and who has herself travelled regularly to places such as Burma and Nigeria, said that we must ensure that we do not block information to places and societies that are closed in such ways. She appealed for more, not less, reporting in places such as Nigeria and Armenia.

The noble Lord, Lord Watson, was right: he took part in the last debate that the Cross Benches initiated on this and said that it would not be the last. He underlined the need to return to a traditional funding model. That was emphasised again and again throughout the debate, not least by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, from the Opposition Front Bench. He said that we must be proud of the BBC World Service and that we should revisit this question, looking at updating the integrated review and reassessing the pattern of changing needs.

Just before this debate, we heard how a BBC journalist in China, Edward Lawrence, had been assaulted and arrested. On being freed, he has bravely returned to his work. For me, his story represents what today's debate is all about. It underlines the importance of what the BBC World Service does, and your Lordships' House must go on, as it has today from across the political divide, emphasising its importance and fighting for its future over the next 100 years.

Motion agreed.

Finance Bill

First Reading

2.46 pm

The Bill was brought from the Commons, endorsed as a money Bill, and read a first time.

Metropolitan Police: Crime and Misconduct

Question for Short Debate

2.46 pm

Asked by Lord Lexden

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the commitments made by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police on 18 November to tackle crime and misconduct within the Metropolitan Police.

Lord Lexden (Con): My Lords, the Question which is the subject of this short debate refers to an important interview given by the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, to the *Times* on 18 November and published the following day. When Sir Mark took up his post in September, he promised to be “ruthless”—his word—in rooting out officers who have brought shame on a famous institution. In seven years’ time, the Metropolitan Police will reach its bicentenary. Nothing could be clearer than Sir Mark’s determination to restore its reputation as soon as possible. His sense of urgency is palpable. For that, he deserves the highest praise.

Sir Mark is entitled to expect the full and active support of the party which first assumed the name of Conservative in 1834 under Sir Robert Peel, who had founded the Metropolitan Police five years earlier. In 1827, as he prepared his great reform, Peel said:

“I can make a better arrangement after a searching inquiry and a thorough exposure of the defects of the present system.” Sir Mark is saying much the same thing today, conveyed with particular vigour in his *Times* interview—and this Conservative Government should back him to the hilt.

After the exposure of defects must come the establishment of better arrangements. Peel’s vision must be recreated: a police force that is “civil and attentive”—his words—in all its dealings with the people it exists to serve. So many defects have now been exposed. Over the last few years, the Met has been engulfed by terrible revelations of racism, misogyny, misconduct and crime. A succession of reports has documented the recent scandals.

Further back, there were other appalling scandals, some documented in police reports that have remained secret, such as that on Operation Tiberius in 2002, which set out in detail what it described as “endemic police corruption” in north and east London. Other shocking cases, the subject of horrifying publicity, are seared for ever on our minds with their painful memories that will never die.

For me personally, Operation Midland remains a vivid enduring memory. Great public servants, Lord Bramall and Lord Brittan, were hounded remorselessly. In his thorough independent report, Sir Richard Henriques listed 43 major police blunders. Officers broke the law when they sought warrants to search the homes of suspects who were entirely innocent, yet not one police officer has been held to account. Not surprisingly, Sir Richard has made his dissatisfaction very clear.

That disastrous operation contributed to another grave injustice: the slurs placed on the reputation of Sir Edward Heath by the then chief constable of Wiltshire, Mike Veale, who fell for the same lies, peddled by a fantasist, that drove Operation Midland along its disastrous way—yet the Government dismiss the case for an independent inquiry into this injustice on the grounds that the internal police reviews which have taken place must suffice. They do not.

Sadly, against this deeply distressing background, it came as no surprise when last month yet another independent report, the latest in a long succession, this one by the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, revealed long-established habits of wrongdoing and criminality among serving officers. Many, she concluded, ought to have

been dismissed, yet only 13 of more than 1,800 Met officers who have faced multiple charges of misconduct since 2013 have actually been dismissed. That is a truly appalling statistic.

To his great credit, Sir Mark Rowley does not seek to set aside or diminish these grave problems. In his *Times* interview, he said:

“I’m just so, so angry about the decisions that have been made on some of these cases”.

He accepts that a large number of officers and staff should have been dismissed. He has stated explicitly that

“there must be hundreds of officers that shouldn’t be here, who should be thrown out. There must be hundreds undermining our integrity.”

Swift and drastic action is needed. It has been done before. In the late 1960s, Sir Robert Mark, who went on to become one of the greatest Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, dealt with massive corruption in the force by dismissing 478 officers and prosecuting some 50 more, including some of high rank.

Conservatives are natural supporters of the police. They want to see the police praised, not criticised. It is a laudable sentiment, but if we want to praise them with conviction in London, we must give Sir Mark our full backing. He is making himself a determined reformer precisely because he wants to shed the corrupt minority so that the “heroic, determined” majority, to whom he referred in his *Times* interview, can regain the credit and respect they deserve. But he faces a great difficulty in dealing with the 3,500 officers who cannot serve the people of London fully, 500 of whom have been accused of serious misconduct.

The police’s disciplinary procedures are unduly complex and protracted. In his *Times* interview Sir Mark said:

“We can’t deal with a workforce where such a big proportion are not properly deployable. Many of these people ... can’t work many hours in the day, or they can only have limited contact time with the public”.

Sir Mark has laid great stress on his need for stronger powers to bear down on criminals and other failures within the ranks. Of course, he wants above all to get rid of officers guilty of serious misconduct. Will existing regulations be changed to assist him? He deserves a swift and decisive response from the Home Office. It seems that he is unlikely to get it. A review is under way to assess whether the regulatory framework for the disciplinary system should be changed.

A great department of state should be capable of reaching a prompt decision on such an urgent matter without a time-consuming review. Has the Home Office woken up to the scale of the crisis? Replying to me in October after the Casey review, my noble friend Lord Sharpe referred to the Met’s failures as “worrying”. Worrying? “Dire” and “catastrophic” would be more like it. My noble friend also told me that just seven officers had been suspended. How can that be squared with Sir Mark’s figure, given in his *Times* interview, of 500 officers on restricted duties or suspended because they have been accused of serious misconduct?

On 3 November 1829, the Duke of Wellington, who was then Prime Minister, wrote to Robert Peel and said:

“I congratulate you upon the entire success of the police in London”.

[LORD LEXDEN]

Would a Prime Minister be able to write in similar fashion in our times? Thanks to Sir Mark Rowley's deep commitment to reform, there is hope—but the Home Office must also commit itself to decisive reform. In his *Times* interview, Sir Mark said we must be “bold”. Will the Home Office be bold too? We shall find out at the end of this short debate.

2.55 pm

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, for this short debate.

I welcome the Metropolitan Police Commissioner's commitments to tackle crime and misconduct, but he is not the first commissioner to make such a commitment. Recommendations 55 to 59 of the report of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, published in February 1999, focus on discipline and complaints against police officers. Recommendation 55 states:

“That the changes to Police Disciplinary and Complaints procedures proposed by the Home Secretary should be fully implemented and closely and publicly monitored as to their effectiveness.”

Is the commissioner making his commitment because this recommendation has not been implemented?

Chapter 2 of the Home Office guidance on police officer misconduct, unsatisfactory performance and attendance management procedures, published in June 2018, focuses on misconduct procedures. This guidance echoes Sir William Macpherson's recommendations, especially to do with investigating complaints against police officers, so who is dropping the ball?

When a case of police officers committing crime becomes public, I have often heard that it is “a few bad apples”. In 2003 the BBC aired an undercover documentary, “The Secret Policeman”, filmed by investigative journalist Mark Daly. He joined Greater Manchester Police and spent several months undercover at the Bruche national training centre in Warrington, Cheshire, where he found that in his class of 18 there was only one person of Asian background and more than half the class held racist views.

My noble friend Lady Casey's report states:

“This Review has reached a conclusion found in several research pieces that precede it—that the Met's misconduct system has evidence of racial disparity. And as reported in previous studies, several reasons are cited for this, which were reflected in testimony from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnicity officers and staff. This included the concern that raising issues relating to racism, or other discrimination and wrongdoing often led to being labelled a trouble maker, which then led to unfair disciplinary action.”

The National Black Police Association has noted on many occasions the revolving door of black officers because of the way they are treated by both their colleagues and their superiors.

The other issue is promotion. Recommendation 59 of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry states:

“That the Home Office review and monitor the system and standards of Police Services applied to the selection and promotion of officers of the rank of Inspector and above. Such procedures for selection and promotion to be monitored and assessed regularly.”

It is not because black officers are not being recruited; it is more to do with retention and promotion. Until the culture and environment in the Metropolitan Police support these officers, the revolving door will continue.

In conclusion, over the past three decades there have been reports into conduct and misconduct in the Metropolitan Police, such as the Scarman report in the 1980s, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report in 1999, the Lammy review in 2017 and, this October, the report by the noble Baroness, Lady Casey. The issues are well noted in these reports and the November 2022 report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services on *An Inspection of Vetting, Misconduct, and Misogyny in the Police Service*.

On behalf of every black person who has ever worked in the Metropolitan Police or trusted a police officer to do their work and treat them with respect and dignity, we would like to see Sir Mark Rowley's commitment mean less rhetoric and more action.

3.01 pm

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, I was brought up in the 1950s and taught by my parents that you could trust a policeman—if you ever needed help, you could go to a police officer and they would do what they could to help. However, that is just not possible any more, is it? I doubt many parents teach their children that particular trope.

I am not alone in my distrust. Trust in the police is extremely low, which is very concerning, and I am glad the new commissioner has picked up on that aspect. I do not doubt that he has a difficult job to do, as more and more reports come in of very poor decisions by officers, whether that is policing protests by arresting journalists, being in WhatsApp groups that show racism, homophobia and sexism or even state-sponsored crimes that officers have committed—when undercover, for example, especially the spy cops who infiltrated campaigns through abusive misogynistic relationships with women campaigners. That inquiry has been drawn out for many years, partly because the Met have not co-operated in releasing vital information. It has preferred to protect officers' criminal actions.

The new commissioner has vowed to improve recruitment, conduct and discipline in the force. All those aspects are relevant. For example, the issues of police violence towards women, sexism and misogyny need dealing with urgently. Officers need training and supervision as well as punishments for infringements, and the Met needs support for whistleblowers. The behaviour of Wayne Couzens over a period of many years, which was accepted and joked about by other officers, is a dire warning of widespread bigotry and very disturbing conduct being allowed.

A senior officer asked me this week what areas of policing the police were getting right—and I could not reply. I could not think of one. It is entirely possible that the two units I massively supported when I was a member of the Metropolitan Police Authority during the 12 years of its existence, the traffic unit and the wildlife crime unit, are still doing a superb job. I trust that they are. They were both amazing and the public pretty much supported them.

The Government have a role here, of course; they cannot leave the police to do this on their own. Legislation has to be clear. I think one of the factors in the police losing public support in lockdown was the fact that the Government poured on laws, guidance and advice

that often conflicted, and therefore the police were quite often left not knowing what the appropriate tool was to do their job. That really did not help. It created a lot of conflict between police and public.

I argue that the Public Order Bill is a good example of what the Government should not be doing. It has been drafted poorly. There are all sorts of weird gaps in it and some very confused terms which will not help the police to police protests. The Bill is designed to prevent protests and stifle dissent, most currently about the climate crisis, but we all know that emissions are not slowing. Scientists warn of a possible permanent collapse of our food and water supply, and of civilisation itself. Our Government are quelling the dissent not by acting and improving on the situation with things that would, in the long term, save massive amounts of public money; they are dealing with the symptom, which is people going out on the streets and saying, "This isn't right". The police are having to deal with problems caused by the Government and become distracted by the real crime committed by the Government themselves.

3.05 pm

Lord Blair of Boughton (CB): My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, and listened carefully to the issues he raised. I agree with every word he said. I declare that I have lectured extensively, especially in India, on anti-corruption measures.

I served for four years as the Met commissioner, from 2005 to 2008, and always have some fellow feeling for each new commissioner as they arrive. I was in conversation with the noble Lord, Lord Grade, recently as the previous PM got herself into ever deeper trouble. He remarked that the most difficult jobs in British public life were those of the Prime Minister, the director-general of the BBC and the Met commissioner—and not always in that order. I should tell the House that in preparation for this debate I have spoken to Sir Mark Rowley. I speak with his assistance but not for him.

I cannot remember a commissioner coming into office in such inauspicious circumstances. He will need all the help that legislators can give to him. The dreadful murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Met officer has thrown up failures of vetting and intelligence but, above all, the new importance of social media, which allows individuals—apparently in a number of professions—to say disgusting things in private association which they would never dare say in a public arena. This is a really significant departure from even the recent past. Mark Rowley chooses to term this sort of behaviour as a corruption of the profession of policing, and I accept that. Police corruption, however, is not a question of occasional bad apples but a continuous threat.

Lord Condon, now retired from the House, commented that the Met was the cleanest big-city force in the world. Maybe, but police corruption never goes away. The first "trial of the detectives", as it was known, involved Met officers in a horse-betting scandal in 1876. The *Times* inquiry of 1969 revealed the existence of networked corruption in the Met CID, encapsulated in the famous phrase, "I am a member of a little firm within a firm". As the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, said,

three years later Robert Mark embarked on a ruthless purge as soon as he was appointed. Hundreds of officers were sacked; many, including some senior officers, were jailed.

The noble Lord, Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, followed Robert Mark's example, as did I in the early 2000s, including with the creation of an entirely secret investigation unit. Corruption mutates: when I left office, the networked corruption had been broken but the sale of computerised information by individuals was beginning to become a threat. It needs ruthless attention; it needs to be a feature of career aspiration to be in an anti-corruption unit, and that task is not easy. One of the cases I took as an investigator to the Old Bailey, where we had arrested the briber as well as the receiver, had four juries dismissed and the case was opened five times. It needs leadership from the very top, which includes reassuring the vast proportion of decent officers that their honesty and professionalism is understood and valued.

I believe that Sir Mark Rowley will provide that, but he needs some help. In a classic example of the road to hell being paved with good intentions, the current Government took away from chief officers the final decision as to whether an officer should be sacked, except in the most egregious and obvious of cases. Discipline proceedings are now presided over by legally qualified chairs, who seem to have a propensity to reprimand rather than dismiss, to the despair of Sir Mark. As Sir Mark has noted in a recent letter to all London MPs:

"This has led to instances of the Met being forced to retain officers whom we cannot deploy and we believe should not be police officers".

That this needs to change is a central conclusion of the recent interim report by the noble Baroness, Lady Casey. This will need a reform to primary legislation.

In the same letter, Sir Mark also refers to the Police (Performance) Regulations 2020, which deal with officers who are not in any way criminal but who are just proving to be unsuited to the job. These regulations require three different stages of review and, consequently, three stages of appeal. In a telephone call with me, Sir Mark noted that this means that the numbers dismissed for not being competent are simply vanishingly small. He also noted that even failing vetting does not lead to reasonably instant dismissal. I hope that, in closing this debate, the Minister will acknowledge these issues and agree to bring them to the attention of the Home Secretary.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): I gently remind noble Lords of the speaking time. If we all run over, it squeezes the time available to the Minister to respond.

3.10 pm

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, it is an absolute pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Blair of Boughton—the noble and ever-civil Lord, I say, because I think we should search for an adjective for senior retired police officers who come to this House. It is rather unfair that they do not have an adjective in the way that some senior lawyers and military people do. We have sparred many times over the years, but I

[BARONESS CHAKRABARTI]

think always from a shared position of support for the rule of law. When we have disagreed, we have done so well.

It is always an absolute honour to speak in a debate with my noble friend Lady Lawrence, who is, in my humble opinion, the greatest race equality campaigner in British history.

In the remaining three minutes, I will give two thoughts. I have one for the Minister that I will keep short, because I fear that I have made his ears bleed too much of late—there is supposed to be some kind of law against that sort of thing. I also have one short thought for the noble Lord, Lord Lexden.

To the Minister, I say: we both agree that operational independence is totally essential for the police service, but, in my view, it does not remotely interfere with the operational independence of the police service to have a clear and improved legislative framework to aid with this disciplinary problem. A police discipline Bill is now required to aid the new Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis and other chief constables—I really believe that, and I am not someone who urges for unnecessary legislation. Governments of both persuasions are very quick and eager to legislate for police powers and then to blame the police when those overbroad powers lead to unintended and arbitrary consequences. The other side of that deal is surely that the Government should legislate appropriately for police discipline.

My short thought for the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, is simply that I thank him. I thank him for constantly reminding me in this place that support for the rule of law, properly constrained police powers and a proper holding to account of the sacred trust that we put in the police service are truly bipartisan matters in a constitutional democracy. We may sit on opposite sides of this Chamber, but he really has my undying solidarity, admiration and respect.

3.13 pm

Lord Gold (Con): My Lords, I first thank my noble friend Lord Lexden for initiating this debate. There is no dispute that there have been deep cultural issues in the Metropolitan Police and the existing disciplinary regime is not working effectively. Essential as it is to cure the flawed disciplinary system, that is not enough. Something serious has gone wrong beforehand, otherwise a disciplinary process would not be necessary.

I have spent the last 12 years advising major companies that have found themselves under investigation by the SFO and often the DOJ in Washington. Most of these companies have had tight rules and procedures in place, an effective training regime and a strong disciplinary system—yet issues have arisen, resulting in external investigation. To a large extent, the Met is in the same position, and it could learn a lesson from how the commercial world has sought to clean up its act.

The following is essential. First, the tone from the top is key. Whoever is in charge must demonstrate to everyone in the organisation, not just by words but by actions, that only acceptable behaviour and conduct will be tolerated. Sir Mark Rowley's commitments are a serious demonstration of what is needed and, hopefully, that will be a wake-up call to everyone in the Met.

That message from the top has to run through the whole organisation so that every officer, of whatever rank, is on message and, again, shows by their words and actions that only acceptable behaviour will be tolerated.

While conventional training is essential, I fear that some believe that simply attending a lecture course means that the job is done and training is complete, and they can move on to something else. I am afraid that is a fallacy. One has to win over the hearts and minds of everyone in the organisation. It is not simply a matter of following rules; the goal is to reach a point where everyone instinctively does the right thing. Those who cannot have no place in the police force.

That requires everyone to understand the difference between right and wrong. There should be complete transparency so that issues are openly discussed and everyone feels able to question conduct and decisions that may have been taken, even by senior officers. Holding regular team meetings where officers are encouraged to speak of issues or experiences that they may have had is very worth while. This is essential to bring the conventional training to life. Using real-life examples for discussion of how difficult situations have been handled is invaluable.

At such meetings, all attending should be encouraged to come forward to express their views. Nothing should be left unsaid, even if difficult conversations follow. In the perfect society, officers should feel able to raise issues with their seniors in the hope that they will be dealt with sensitively and effectively. Being realistic, I know that in many organisations staff are nervous to speak to management for fear of retribution, and I am sure that this would be a risk at the Met. In the commercial organisations that I have worked with, ethics champions have been appointed at all levels to provide advice and guidance if difficult problems arise and to act as a link with senior management. Those champions are team members, properly trained to understand good compliance and trusted by colleagues who feel confident to raise issues with them, knowing that they will try to resolve the problem. As a failsafe, a whistleblower line should be in place so that those fearful of reporting incidents of bad behaviours to their seniors or even of speaking to an ethics officer have someone to report to. Typically, callers remain anonymous unless they choose otherwise.

Changing the culture in any organisation takes much effort by everyone, and the process takes years for real progress to be achieved. There have to be constant reminders to everyone that good behaviours are essential and that misconduct will not be tolerated. If the Met is to change, it has to start this process now.

3.18 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Gold, and I thank him for sharing his experience with us. Like others, I want to take the opportunity to thank the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, for securing this important debate. These issues affect millions of people's lives every day. I commend him also for in a short time—10 minutes—making a compelling case for action now. In a sense, the rest of us are just corroborating witnesses to his introduction.

The thread that links together the concerns we have heard is accountability and it takes many forms: the accountability of those guilty of misconduct, of senior officers, including the Commissioner, to the Mayor of London and to the Home Secretary, and of all police officers to the public they serve. Surveys reveal that public confidence in the police has been in a downward trend from 2017.

Today, I want like others to focus on the accountability that the Government face for political decisions that may have exacerbated, and in some cases have exacerbated, the difficulties faced in holding to account officers guilty of misconduct and, much more importantly, ensuring that those likely to commit offences are debarred from joining the police force in the first place.

A key principle of good government is consistency. The last decade of Conservative Government—first in coalition and then straightforwardly—has seen an approach wildly at variance with that principle. Police numbers have been slashed: 23,500 police were cut because of the political decision to pursue austerity-related measures, only to be followed immediately by two years of equally grave announcements of the urgent necessity to increase police numbers back to the level at which they existed in 2010.

In the year to March 2022, we saw the hurried recruitment of over 12,000 new police staff, on top of a record increase the previous year. That extraordinary staff churn not only compromised the institutional memory of police forces up and down the country but exacerbated already weak vetting and disciplinary processes, as well as appalling and systemic levels of misconduct and crime among serving officers.

This is not just a problem for the Met. The Conservative PCC for Bedfordshire described the vetting process as being “massively overwhelmed”. The chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council said that the process is overwhelmingly manual and that it must become automated for it to be appropriate for modern procedures. The HMIC recommended that the system be made more coherent, with mandatory procedures put in place in all forces.

On 2 November, reporting on his investigation into vetting, Matt Parr revealed that, of the 725 files examined, in 131 the decision to grant clearance was at least “questionable”. He found successful applicants who had criminal records, had been suspected of serious crime and had family links to organised crime or substantial debt. He found serving officers who had attracted allegations of serious misconduct who had transferred to the Met from other police forces across the country. His report also revealed significant faults with misconduct investigations into serving officers, some of whom had gone through these inadequate vetting procedures. In a fifth of cases he examined, in a masterpiece of understatement, he described himself as “unimpressed” by their decision-making. In previous statements, the inspector criticised the promotions system in the police as “inconsistent”, “ineffective” and “unfair”.

Clearly, there are structural weaknesses throughout policing: a vetting system that is weak and inconsistent; a defective complaints system allowing a minority of serving officers, with impunity, to create a toxic work

culture riddled with corruption, casual racism, homophobia, misogyny, prejudice and a lack of care and sensitivity towards victims of violence against women and girls; and a promotions system which is far from meritocratic.

There are many hard-working and principled officers who remain within the system—including Sir Mark Rowley, the focus of this debate, and others—and I hope the Government will give serious thought to how they can best aid them in improving the institutional resilience and culture of our police service nationwide.

3.22 pm

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Browne, and his analysis of the role of good and consistent recruitment in the police.

I was so shocked that I remember exactly where I was when I heard Sir Mark Rowley on the BBC “Today” programme say that he had over 3,000 officers in the Met who he could not fully use due to misconduct allegations and health issues. Of these, we have heard that 500 were suspended or on restricted duties, and that about 100, in the words of Sir Mark, “have very restrictive conditions on them because frankly we don’t trust them to talk to members of the public”.

A recent report by the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, which has already been alluded to, found that fewer than 1% of officers with multiple misconduct cases against them had actually been dismissed. Sir Mark said that “hundreds” of officers “should be thrown out”. Mr Marsh of the Police Federation said, of the worst offenders, “our regulations are so tight so you can dismiss them. But they haven’t and I can’t tell you why.”

Let us see if we can help him. For a start, sacking officers is, apparently, a six-stage process and takes over a year. I wonder how many noble Lords here today think that a year to sack someone with multiple misconduct cases against them is reasonable or workable. Secondly, I understand that every case of serious misconduct in the Met must be adjudicated by a misconduct hearing—a board comprising three people: an independent legal chair, as was alluded to by the noble Lord, Lord Blair; a senior police officer; and a member of the public. Compare this to so-called normal work procedures where an employer has the right to dismiss, but the employee has recourse to an employment tribunal if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

I know from having worked in this field in the dim and distant past that employers have to be extremely careful to follow their own procedures and the law to secure a fair dismissal, and rightly so. But the procedure in the Met seems to run in the reverse order, with the panel itself making the dismissal. So with the confidence of the ignorant, let me make a suggestion. What about giving the chief constable the powers to dismiss and back that up with a robust appeals procedure afterwards? If every dismissal currently takes over a year, and fewer than 1% of police officers with multiple misconduct cases against them get fired, and one in 10 officers is not fully deployable, something needs to radically change. Clearly, Sir Mark needs new, powerful tools to do the job.

[BARONESS BURT OF SOLIHULL]

However, we must keep things in proportion. Sir Mark told the BBC that the Met had

“tens of thousands of great officers who are doing amazing things day in and day out for London”.

Absolutely. We know that these officers’ good work is being besmirched, and they, as well as the public, are being let down by those bad apples who think they can carry on with impunity. For all our sakes, will the Minister commit to allowing the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner the tools he needs to cleanse the Augean stables of the stench of corruption and the culture of misogyny, indolence, bigotry and violence? I wish him the very best of luck, and thank the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, for securing this debate today.

3.26 pm

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, for introducing this debate with his very strong historical sense, which we all applaud.

On 17 October this year, the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, published her interim findings on the misconduct system in the Metropolitan Police. Her full report will be published in the new year. I suspect, having heard the testimonies and corroborations today, it will be something of a blockbuster. Her initial report found that the misconduct system is failing officers and the public. She said:

“Cases are taking too long to resolve, allegations are more likely to be dismissed than acted upon, the burden on those raising concerns is too heavy, and there is racial disparity across the system, with White officers dealt with less harshly than Black or Asian officers.”

Since the publication of the findings of the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, in October, we have had a November report from His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary on wider failures in vetting, misconduct, misogyny and racism in the service. That report concluded, to put it simply, that it is

“too easy for the wrong people both to join and to stay in the police”—

a completely damning testimony. The report showed a failure to root out institutional racism; a failure to bar the wrong people from joining the police and root them out, despite multiple incidents of wrongdoing, as other noble Lords have observed; a failure to protect female staff and officers; and a failure to protect the public. This absolutely undermines trust in the police, puts the public at risk, and undermines our model of policing by consent. It is important to recognise the professionalism and service of the majority of our officers, who serve with bravery and integrity, but the actions of others put them in an unsafe environment, and let them down.

We welcome the robust commitments made by the Metropolitan Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, in response to the interim report of the noble Baroness, Lady Casey. The commissioner promised both immediate and long-term action. Can the Minister give an update on what regular discussions the Home Secretary has had with the commissioner to understand what action has been taken? In my days as a serving Home Office Minister, I had bilaterals with the noble Lord, Lord Blair

of Boughton, and his immediate superior, so we ought to have some feedback today. Crucially, the inspectorate report found:

“Over the last decade, there have been many warning signs that these systems aren’t working well enough ... Some forces have repeatedly failed to implement recommendations—from us and other bodies”.

Similarly, the noble Baroness’s letter explicitly points out that these problems “are not new”, and that this is not for the Met Commissioner alone to tackle:

“The legal and regulatory framework regarding misconduct should be looked at urgently by the new Home Secretary, together with the College of Policing and National Police Chiefs’ Council.”

My noble friend Lady Lawrence made the point very tellingly, I thought, when she said that this is not a new problem—it is pretty obvious that it is not.

Labour set out many months ago the scale of the changes that are needed across our service. The Home Office has been far too passive in its response. The Met Commissioner is right to pledge urgent action, but these issues go far beyond the Met. The Home Secretary should require every police force to urgently provide data and analysis—of the standard set out in the Casey report—on their misconduct systems, so that we know what is happening in every force. Will the Home Secretary make sure that this happens? The Home Secretary also needs to urgently set out a new national framework on standards and misconduct. My noble friend Lady Chakrabarti expressed that well. Labour has been clear that we would overhaul misconduct systems, alongside introducing stronger vetting, training and whistleblowing processes, and mandatory national rules that all forces must follow.

The inspectorate report contained 43 recommendations, including for the Home Office. Can the Minister give an update on the urgent action under way to see the recommendations acted on? Following the Casey report, the Home Office announced

“an internal review into the process of police dismissals to raise standards and confidence in policing across England and Wales.”—
[*Official Report*, Commons, 18/10/22; col. 23WS.]

Perhaps the Minister can give us an update on that review. This is a matter of the highest urgency.

3.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords for their contributions and I congratulate my noble friend Lord Lexden on securing this important debate.

Public confidence is, as all speakers have noted, a precious commodity for policing. When it is lost or damaged, the impact is significant and profound. Every time a high-profile incident occurs or a scathing report is published, that trust is placed in jeopardy. The truth is that recently this has happened all too often. I agree with my noble friend Lord Lexden that I could and perhaps should have used a much stronger word than “worrying” in my letter to him. However, I also take this opportunity to join the noble Lords, Lord Blair and Lord Bassam, in praising the “heroic, determined” majority—to use Sir Mark’s words, which were echoed by my noble friend Lord Lexden.

Things have to improve. Standards have to be raised and cultures reset. The Home Secretary has been clear that it is vital that the police act to restore trust, return to common-sense “back to basics” policing and treat the public and victims with the respect that they deserve. As the largest police force in England and Wales, with responsibilities extending beyond the vast task of policing and protecting the capital, the Metropolitan Police Service has a central role to play. The Government are committed to working with the Met Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, and the whole of his organisation. Their task is clear: to get the basics right, drive down and tackle crime, and rebuild public trust.

Many noble Lords have referred to the interim report of the noble Baroness, Lady Casey. Under the commissioner’s leadership, as I have just said, the Met must get back to basics—and get those basics right—and provide the first-class service expected of it. The report of the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, as the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, pointed out, contained many disturbing things, including: allegations of discrimination or sexual misconduct; issues of racial disparity, as referenced by the noble Baroness, Lady Lawrence; and a lack of confidence internally that such allegations will be taken seriously.

The commissioner has already set out a plan for his first 100 days to, in his words,

“renew policing by consent ... to bring more trust, less crime and high standards”

and, obviously, to deal with some of the findings of the Casey report. As part of that process, and going beyond those 100 days, Sir Mark Rowley attends the police performance oversight group, run by HMICFRS. The group brings together system leaders from across policing to offer constructive challenge and practical support to chief constables of engaged forces. I will go into this in some detail, with noble Lords’ indulgence. This body is chaired by the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Andy Cooke, who has a clear remit to ensure that forces have realistic and clear improvement plans in place to address the serious concerns about performance that HMICFRS inspections have identified.

Members of this group include His Majesty’s inspectors, the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners performance leads, the College of Policing, the Home Office, represented by the policing policy director, the chief constables themselves, of course, and the PCCs or mayors. It is worth restating, as referenced by the noble Lord, Lord Browne, that the primary accountability body for the Metropolitan Police Service remains the Mayor of London and the London Assembly.

Sir Mark attended his first iteration of this group on 13 October and it met again today in order to review some of the performance measures he has outlined. The members scrutinise the improvement plans and provide expert and constructive challenge—one hopes—where needed and regularly review the progress that is made. The mayor and deputy mayor are also invited, as I said, and attend to ensure that they understand the issues and underlying causes of the failures that have been identified and can therefore more effectively monitor, scrutinise and support their chiefs.

The Home Office attends to provide Ministers with the assurance that sufficient and urgent improvement action is under way. Where appropriate, the department considers what additional support it may be able to offer to accelerate progress towards that improvement. Ultimately, officials consider whether the Home Secretary may need advice on using her backstop powers, but I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, that the Home Secretary does, of course, meet the police commissioner on a regular basis.

In addition to the police performance oversight group, Sir Mark has also established governance to ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service is challenged and supported on its plans for improvement. These arrangements include the Deputy Mayor and the relevant director-general for public safety from the Home Office—I believe that is called a “turnaround board”.

As for other things the Home Office has done, we have set out clear priorities for all policing through the national crime and policing measures outlined in the *Beating Crime Plan*, which was published in July 2021. The plan sets out the Government’s strategic approach to cutting crime and restoring confidence in the criminal justice system more generally, but also includes a focus on reducing homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime. To allow effective performance management, the Home Office has developed the digital crime and performance pack, which provides published and unpublished data on the Met’s performance relative to other forces and nationally. This has been made available to all chiefs and PCCs.

Most noble Lords raised the subject of police vetting. Following the tragic events surrounding the death of Sarah Everard, the previous Home Secretary commissioned an inspection into police vetting, countercorruption capabilities, misogyny and predatory behaviour. That report, which was published on 2 November, highlighted that policing must do more to safeguard the integrity of the police workforce. Previous inspections also highlighted risks that can arise with poor vetting practice. The NPCC has committed to addressing the recommendations in the report in full. Three recommendations have also been made to the Home Office, and we will be addressing those. Following the HMICFRS report on vetting, misconduct and misogyny, it plans to dip-sample force decision-making on vetting as part of its regular inspections, so that there is ongoing scrutiny of decisions, including forces’ risk appetite.

I was asked whether our unprecedented drive to recruit has perhaps been driving perverse behaviours or causing forces to cut corners. The honest answer is no. Meeting the commitment to recruit the additional 20,000 has not been and will never be at the expense of public safety. The various process improvements and substantial funding provided by the programme means that policing has the tools and ability to recruit in greater volumes while maintaining standards. I go back to the point I just made: the HMICFRS is introducing regular dip-sampling to make sure that that remains the case.

On police misconduct and the discipline system, which of course includes dismissal reviews, the Government announced a review in response to the interim report of the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, into the process of police officer dismissals, with the aim of

[LORD SHARPE OF EPSOM]

ensuring that the system is fair and effective at removing those who are not fit to serve their communities. The Home Office is responsible for the regulatory framework. This follows significant reforms to the disciplinary system in recent years, including the introduction of independent, legally qualified chairs; public misconduct hearings; the ability to bring misconduct proceedings for former police officers; and the introduction of the police barred list. The Home Office is going to work closely with police partners, including the Metropolitan Police, as part of the review, and the terms of reference will be published in the very near future.

The Government are aware of the commissioner's concerns around the number of officers not fully deployable but, ultimately, decisions on whether to suspend an officer or place them on restricted duties are a matter for chief constables. I have some data on this for the House. It probably does not entirely accord with Sir Mark's comments in the newspaper report the other day—it was a snapshot taken at the end of March—but I think it is useful for context.

As of March 2022, the police workforce statistics showed that the Met has 780 officers on recuperative duties—about 2.3% of the workforce, compared with 4.5% nationally. Some 2,718 officers were on restricted or adjusted duties. “Adjusted duties” is worth defining. It is where an officer fails to recover from recuperative duties or another medical issue is identified, but where it is agreed that the officer, with reasonable adjustments, is able to discharge a substantive police role without unreasonable detriment to the overall force effectiveness or resilience, as judged by the chief officer. I am sorry that that is a bit of a mouthful, but it is worth defining. Unfortunately, we do not split the 2,718 into the various categories.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): That is 10% of the Met's active force. Are any other forces in the UK operating with that degree of handicap?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): The average is 4.7%, and it is actually 8% of the Met's workforce—but I agree that it is a heavier number than we would see nationally. As was referenced earlier, seven officers are currently suspended—0.02% of the workforce, compared with 0.15% nationally. I accept that those numbers are not particularly reassuring: obviously, much needs to be done to fix this problem.

As I said earlier, decisions on whether to suspend an officer or place them on restricted duties are a matter for chief constables. It is also at chief constables' discretion to place officers on adjusted duties, as the guidance sets out fairly clearly. Where officers' performance is unsatisfactory or they commit an act of gross incompetence, there are existing mechanisms to be able to dismiss them from the force. The Home Office will continue to work with forces to ensure that there is an effective regulatory framework in place. Whether we end up with legislative change or not, as suggested by the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, and the noble Lord, Lord Blair, I really cannot predict.

My noble friend Lord Lexden referred to Operation Midland, which we have discussed many times in this House. As ever, his points were well made. On the remarks made by the former Home Secretary that he

referred to, in which she stated that profound concerns existed about the handling of this operation, the Independent Office for Police Conduct responded to criticism of its handling in a letter sent to Sir Richard Henriques on 31 March 2021. That is available on the government website. The IOPC publishes further information on its performance and plans on its website. As announced by the former Home Secretary on 15 June 2021, an independent review of the IOPC—another review, I am afraid—is due to start this year. This will consider the organisation's effectiveness and efficiency, including its decision-making processes.

I regret that I am running out of time. In closing, I repeat my earlier thanks to my noble friend Lord Lexden for securing this debate. I am grateful too to all other noble Lords who have contributed today. These are issues of the utmost importance, not only in relation to the way our capital city is policed but for British policing as a whole. The Metropolitan Police has a unique status within our policing system. Under the commissioner's leadership, the force must step up to the task of driving down crime, upholding high standards and securing public trust. I commend the work that Sir Mark Rowley has done so far and look forward to seeing the rest of it concluded successfully. That is what the Government expect, and we will continue challenging the Met and the whole of policing to achieve it.

Rail Cancellations and Service Levels

Statement

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con): My Lords, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer given by my honourable friend to an Urgent Question in another place. The Statement is as follows:

“Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Lady for her Urgent Question, which gives us the opportunity to set out the Government's disappointment with the experience of many passengers, not just across the north, but in other parts of the country. We recognise that current performance is not acceptable and is having an effect on passengers and the northern economy.

I will focus on two operators to set the scene. The first is TransPennine Express services. TPE services have been impacted by a number of factors, including higher than average sickness levels among train crew, the withdrawal of driver rest day working, which is the option for drivers to work on their non-working days as overtime, the withdrawal of conductor rest day working and other overtime working, and strike action on Sundays and some Saturdays since mid-February under a formal RMT union dispute.

TransPennine Express had a formal rest day working agreement with ASLEF that was due to expire in December 2021. The rates of pay under the agreement were 1.75 times the basic pay with a minimum of 10 hours paid, the most generous such agreement in the industry. In December 2021, TPE approached ASLEF seeking agreement to extend the existing agreement. Rest day working forms no part of the terms and conditions, so either side is free to refuse or enter into the agreement when it expires.

On this occasion, local ASLEF officials refused to extend the agreement and sought to negotiate different terms. In the absence of a new agreement, drivers withdrew their rest day working when the existing agreement ended, and further offers have not materialised into an agreement. TPE is undertaking an intense programme of crew training to eliminate a backlog of pandemic-induced route knowledge loss and delayed traction training, and to prepare the business for timetable changes such as the Manchester recovery taskforce December 2022 change.

Turning briefly to Avanti, the primary cause of recent problems with Avanti train services has been a shortage of fully trained drivers. It is a long-standing practice for train companies to use a degree of overtime to run the timetable, to the mutual benefit of staff and the operators. Avanti was heavily reliant on drivers volunteering to work additional days because of delays in training during Covid. When volunteering suddenly all but ceased, Avanti was no longer able to operate its timetable. However, nearly 100 additional drivers will have entered formal service this year between April and December, and Avanti West Coast has begun to restore services, focusing on its key Manchester and Birmingham routes.

I end by saying that we need train services which are reliable and resilient to modern-day life. While the companies have taken positive steps to get more trains moving, they must do more to deliver certainty of service to their passengers. We will fully hold them to account for things that are within their control, and we look for others to be held to account on matters that are outside of the train operators' control."

3.47 pm

Lord Tunncliffe (Lab): Last night, TransPennine Express announced 38 cancellations for today. This meant that passengers who had planned for the 0551 service to Manchester Airport could have missed their flight; passengers for the 0618 service from York to Newcastle could have missed morning meetings; and passengers for the 0727 service from Cleethorpes to Manchester Piccadilly could have been late for work. This misery across the rail network is now inflicting real damage to the economy. Will the Government demand a binding remedial plan with clear penalties so that operators do not also ruin Christmas for families across the north of England?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): My Lords, the Government accept that the services are simply not good enough. In the Statement, I was able to outline some of the challenges that TransPennine Express has had to address over recent weeks and months. Short-notice cancellations are particularly harmful, and the Government are working with TransPennine Express to put in place a plan for recovery to ensure that it is able to get its trainee drivers out on to the tracks as quickly as possible. I note that the DfT works closely with Transport for the North as part of the Rail North Partnership in managing both the Northern and TPE contracts. We are in regular dialogue with TPE, and we are obviously engaging with many senior leaders in the north so that they too can hold people to account.

Baroness Randerson (LD): I thank the noble Baroness for her answer, but it did not refer to the loophole that TransPennine Express exploits. When it cancels trains before 10 o'clock, these are not counted in terms of the delay repay compensation. This also massages its statistics, so that it looks better than it is. The real picture is significantly worse than the official picture. Have the Government investigated whether other train operating companies are exploiting this loophole? If so, which ones are? Can the noble Baroness assure us that the rules will change so that passengers get a more honest picture of train performance? Finally, will she assure us that the Government are committed to improving the terms and conditions of their contracts with the train operating companies? Avanti got a seven-figure performance payment, despite it having the worst results across the UK. How can that be right? How can train operating companies be rewarded for abject failure?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): There were plenty of questions to be getting on with there. I am afraid that I am not aware of the loophole that the noble Baroness referred to. I will take that back to the department and write to her with an explanation of how that is included in the performance figures and whether or not we are able to improve the communications with passengers so that they know that trains are not running. We know that certainty is always the best option when it comes to running passenger services. The noble Baroness spoke about the performance fee. I am not entirely sure that it was a performance fee; it may have been a management fee. All fees go through an independent process. If payments are made, they are as a result of the contractual and legal obligations that the Government have with the train operating companies.

Lord Snape (Lab): My Lords, would the Minister accept that Avanti does not just run its services badly but is responsible for the poor operation of many railway stations? My journey from Birmingham International this morning is a perfect example of how bad things are. I arrived for the 12 o'clock train. The lift had been out of order for three weeks. On the board, the train was shown as being on time; when I got through the barrier, it was shown as cancelled; and when I got to the platform, it was shown as delayed. The staff are unsupervised, unmotivated and disillusioned because of the lack of any management operation so far as Avanti is concerned. I asked to see the manager, but there are no managers around. I got to London the usual 40 minutes late. If Ministers had to travel on this shoddy service, Avanti would have been fired months since.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): Obviously, I am deeply disappointed by what the noble Lord experienced. Ministers do travel on these services; I get it in the neck quite frequently from colleagues. I reassure the noble Lord that I have arranged a meeting with the Rail Minister, as promised previously in your Lordships' House. That is now in the diary and I hope to be able to share the date of that meeting with noble Lords. I hope the noble Lord will come to that meeting, set out his concerns and allow the Rail Minister to set out

[BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON]

exactly what the Government are doing, working with Avanti, TPE and many of the train operating companies, to improve services across the country.

Lord Liddle (Lab): I should declare an interest as a regular traveller from Carlisle to London with Avanti, as well as an occasional traveller with TPE to see my son and daughter-in-law in Edinburgh. What evidence is there that their services are improving? When I came down on Monday morning, every other train from Glasgow to London was cancelled—a 50% cut. Whereas the normal journey time from Carlisle to London is three hours and 20 minutes, it has extended the timetable by at least half an hour and then a high proportion of the trains are late. Why have the Government not acted, as a decisive Government would, and withdrawn the franchise from these disastrous operators?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): The Government have acted in a very decisive fashion.

A noble Lord: My Lords—

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): Perhaps the noble Lord will allow me to finish. Officials meet Avanti weekly. A recovery plan has been agreed with Ministers and with the ORR, and we are monitoring whether or not Avanti is meeting that recovery plan—currently it is—and 100 new drivers have entered into service between April and December. I reiterate to the noble Lord, as I believe I have done previously, that removing the franchise from an operator would not make the service any better, because not even the Government can rustle up train drivers out of nowhere.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, the word “nationwide” occurs in the Question. I have every possible sympathy with the noble Lord, Lord Snape, and others, but there are those who use the east coast main line, and various strikes are threatened. Is my noble friend at all confident that the strikes between now and Christmas, which could prevent my coming here or going back from here, will take place, and what is being done to try to ensure that they do not?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): I recognise that industrial action is planned between now and Christmas. The Government are doing whatever they can to act as a facilitator and a convenor. The position remains that negotiations need to happen between the train operating companies and the unions. However, we know that strikes make matters worse for the union members, passengers, the railway and, indeed, the economy. My fear is that as the strikes continue, we risk driving passengers away and entering into a cycle of decline in our railways that we do not want to see. Therefore the Government are very focused on trying to get to a stage where we no longer have the strikes. That depends on having modernising reforms, which are needed such that we can then afford a fair agreement with workers.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Lab): My Lords, the Minister suggested that Avanti was sticking to the plan that it had made with the Government. All I can say is that it seems a pretty shoddy plan if the way in which it is sticking to it leads to so many delays.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): We are working carefully with Avanti. The next uptick in services will happen on 11 December, when we will see 264 services daily on a weekday, which is up from 180 now. Unfortunately, I fear that noble Lords will not see an improvement that day or indeed on any of the subsequent days, because the services will be beset by strikes and other industrial action. Many things are going on here. The Government will absolutely hold Avanti to account for the things within its control, but we need others to hold people to account for things not in its control.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, the Minister referred to strikes making things much worse, and of course they are. However, I wonder, listening to some of the reasons for industrial action, whether the Government have presented the overall context of the situation we are in nationally in quite the right terms. The other day, the noble Lord, Lord Skidelsky, reminded us that we have drifted into what is very near a war situation, with inflation, shortage and the obvious need for everybody to face for a time—for the duration—reduced living standards and increased deprivation. That is clear. Yet here we have all the arguments about the need for catching up in real terms, improving contracts, asserting a new deal and so on and so forth. This does not seem the right language for the crisis we are in. Is there not a case for explaining more clearly to the many groups who feel they are oppressed in their living standards that this is something we all have to face for a while until we can get out of two or three of the biggest crises that have faced us since 1944?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): I am grateful to my noble friend for his contribution. I note that at the recent fiscal event, the Chancellor highlighted the difficult economic circumstances that the country is currently in. However, I reiterate that there is a fair balance to be achieved here, although that balance is affordable only if we are able to achieve the sort of modernisation that our railway system needs, where a seven-day operation is not dependent on the approval of the workforce, just as major supermarkets nowadays would not close on a Sunday. Therefore we need to be able to take those steps towards modernisation, and we believe that then there will be a landing zone when it comes to fair wage increases for workers.

Ukraine: Tactical Nuclear Weapons

Motion to Take Note

4 pm

Moved by Lord Harries of Pentregarth

That this House takes note of the war in Ukraine, including the threatened use of tactical nuclear weapons.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): My Lords, I want this subject considered by your Lordships because although we have discussed Ukraine a fair amount, we have not given all that much attention to the existence of, and threat posed by, tactical nuclear weapons; that

is, weapons of lower yield which can be fired from missiles with a shorter range than strategic weapons, as well as by other means.

By way of background and to avoid any possible misunderstandings, during the fierce debates of the 1980s I was, with much moral fear and spiritual trembling, a defender of the policy of nuclear deterrence. I am still convinced that, for the first time ever in human history, it is not in the interests of one power to go to war with another that possesses nuclear weapons. Although I opposed CND on many occasions in those days, I always felt that it performed a very useful function in keeping before all of us the terrible devastation that the use of such weapons would bring about.

During the 2019 Indo-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir, my fears were first aroused that the world might be forgetting that fact. Recordings were made of generals involved in the fighting, in which they talked about the use of nuclear weapons as though they were hand grenades being lobbed about. It is important for all of us—our own public and, if possible, the Russian general public—to understand the power and effect of these weapons. They have not gone away. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were equivalent to 15 kilotons of explosive energy. Tactical nuclear weapons are available in a range of sizes—0.3, 1.5, 10 or 50 kilotons of explosive energy. Even 0.3 kilotons would cause all the horrors of Hiroshima, albeit on a smaller scale. It would cause a fireball, shockwaves, and deadly radiation that would cause long-term health damage in survivors. Radioactive fallout would continue in air, soil, water and the food supply. Ukrainians are of course already familiar with this kind of outcome because of the disastrous meltdown of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1986.

Russia possesses 2,000 of these tactical nuclear weapons, kept in storage facilities throughout the country. These have been developed to be used against troops and installations in a small area, or in a limited engagement. Such weapons can be launched on the same short-range missiles that Russia is currently using to bombard Ukraine, such as the Iskander ballistic missile, which has a range of 500 kilometres. These are not the only tactical weapons that could be deployed. The United States has about 100 nuclear gravity bombs—deployed with aircraft and therefore with less sophisticated guidance—stationed around Europe, and 130 or so elsewhere.

Many paradoxes are provided by the existence of nuclear weapons, particularly tactical nuclear weapons. In relation to Ukraine, it could be argued that if it was not for such weapons, we would already be involved in a third world war. Friendly countries would likely have wanted to intervene and defend a neighbour against blatant aggression, and it could all have gone from there. Therefore, in one sense, they have already acted as a deterrent. Although Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the presence of nuclear weapons has rightly made NATO even more cautious and it has not directly intervened. On the other hand, as has happened many times in recent decades, under the nuclear umbrella, a limited war can take place. Clearly, one reason why Mr Putin thought he could get away with a limited war in his backyard was that he calculated that his possession

of nuclear weapons would prevent any thought of allies intervening in Ukraine and risking a third world war.

Then, there is the paradox of tactical nuclear weapons. The fact that they could be used in a relatively limited way makes their use more likely, so their presence and fear of escalation to the use of strategic weapons strengthens deterrence overall. On the other hand, for that very reason, they are more dangerous: their use could be envisaged.

The key fact surely is that the gap between the use of conventional weapons and nuclear weapons is a real threshold. It has been maintained for 77 years, providing a nuclear taboo, and it is essential that this be maintained. As President Biden has said:

“I don’t think there’s any such thing as an ability to easily use a tactical nuclear weapon and not end up with Armageddon.”

President Putin, without actually mentioning the word “nuclear”, has already clearly threatened such weapons’ use through the belligerent language he has chosen. We know from his behaviour that his threats have to be taken seriously. On the other hand, expert analysis of possible scenarios for their use regards it as extremely unlikely, but again, as Lawrence Freedman puts it with his characteristic wisdom, he does not see the use of nuclear weapons

“as being a likely development, but we always ... keep on coming back to President Putin’s state of mind, and his grasp of the situation that he’s put his country into, and how determined he would be to avoid”

the “humiliation” of defeat.

There is a continuing risk, which we must never forget: the risk of misunderstandings and a misreading of the situation in the fog of a crisis, as well as the risk of a deliberate and intended threat. In 1963, a direct link between the United States and the Kremlin was set up. I understand that this now takes the form of a secure computer link with encrypted emails. It has been used on a number of occasions: when John F Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963; during the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967; during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War; during the Yom Kippur War of 1973; when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan; and several times during the Reagan Administration, with the Soviets asking questions about events in Lebanon and the United States commenting on the situation in Poland. As recently as October 2016, the hotline was used to reinforce Barack Obama’s September warning that the US would consider any interference on election day a grave matter.

I do not know whether the Minister is in a position to give us an assurance—I will well understand if he is not—but it would be good to know that this form of communication is still in place and regularly tested, so that there are effective means to communicate with Mr Putin in the event of an escalating crisis, and that the European nations are happy that they would have an adequate means to contribute to any such communication. Such an escalation of the crisis could come if Ukraine advances to the border of Crimea.

More widely on the war, it is good that the UK has given Ukraine full support from the beginning and that we are supplying necessary equipment. It is clearly important that we do not falter in our resolve. In

[LORD HARRIES OF PENTREGARTH]

particular, Ukraine needs the most effective air defence systems to combat the terrible missile and drone attacks on its infrastructure. I would also like to be assured that it is being helped to combat cyberattacks, which can disable every aspect of a whole country's infrastructure and are increasingly dangerous and damaging.

The war will end, and as very few wars end in total surrender a time will come for negotiations. When that time should be is, of course, above all a matter for the Ukrainians. But we can hope and pray that the Ukrainian push will continue and that Russian forces will be forced to retreat from the Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia areas to the borders of Russia and Crimea—although I fear that, with winter and Russian forces dug in beyond the Dnieper, it will not be easy. At that point, on the border of Crimea, when the stakes would be raised very high indeed, perhaps Mr Putin would be happy to agree to a ceasefire and engage in talks. Until that happens, I hope we will continue to give Ukraine all the military support we can, especially the air defence systems we have already agreed to, and more. I beg to move.

4.10 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, on bringing forward this debate. It is the second time in a week or so that he has secured a debate on a vital international topic. He is doing the work of this House's business managers for them by playing to the Lords' strengths in this area. At a time when our colleagues in the other place seem to be sinking down the plughole of bickering and short-termism, it is the accumulated experience of their Lordships that can focus on the international issues which, in the end, are more decisive than any others in our daily lives and our long-term existence as a nation. So I hope the noble and right reverend Lord will take an accolade from me for making a better case than most for a future active and experienced House of Lords.

The potential use of tactical nuclear weapons is the most important issue of all because, of course, it would unlock grim escalation and proliferation, end the balance of nuclear deterrence entirely and lead us straight to a world war and mass incineration with the consequences the noble and right reverend Lord just described.

I do not believe, as some do, that there is a halfway house between small tactical nuclear weapons and the full force of massive destruction on a scale never seen before in human history. In the present fraught situation, it is China, rather than Russia, where the key lies to governing Putin's actions. There is no doubt in my mind that until now, China has been the most powerful restraint on Putin and his warmongering generals. As he increasingly loses on the ground to Ukrainian resilience and ingenuity, Putin's latest assurance, about a fortnight ago, was that he would not use nuclear weapons in Ukraine after all. Of course, that cannot be trusted; it is just one statement. It is interesting that he had to make it, because it should be seen entirely in the context of trying to keep China's vague approval of what he is doing. In all the back-track exchanges with Russia since the Russian invasion, in addition to

the official hotline, to which I have had the privilege of access, Putin's toying with nuclear weapons has been China's No. 1 concern. It has been quite ready to use its good offices with Moscow in exchange for specific restraints on American and NATO supply and the technological sophistication of weapons.

China may have immediate problems with Xi Jinping's rising unpopularity and all the riots, but these will not affect its weight and influence with Moscow. Their relationship may have started out as an unlimited partnership, but China has not supplied weapons to Russia, and it has applied quite a few financial and trading controls. China's business community is deeply apprehensive about the effect of Putin's war on their world business. For example, Chinese citizens are not even allowed to use their credit cards in Russia and have to carry around piles of cash when they visit. They would much prefer being mediators to being rooters for Russian success.

Longer term, China is a big nuclear power and now, according to the Americans, it is planning—idiotically, in my view—to triple its nuclear arsenal. By preparing for superpower conflict and hegemonic struggle with the US, it is heading on precisely the wrong route, greatly to the detriment of the Chinese people. This unfolding crisis, with its impatient and aggressive turn towards Taiwan, is the next chapter. All needs urgently to be managed and controlled, as it was in the Cold War, to prevent the situation turning red hot. We will need many further debates on that, but in the meantime, ugly though Chinese policies have become in many areas, and on our guard though we must be with every action they take, this is one area where we must work with the Chinese so they carry on being the vital restraint on Russia's nuclear madness.

4.14 pm

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I have supported military interventions in the Falklands, Iraq and central Europe, but on this conflict I have repeatedly expressed my concerns. I join the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, in some of the concerns he expressed.

In a dozen contributions since before the Russian invasion, I have argued against western military intervention and in favour of talks. At that time, Luhansk and Donetsk were provinces under Ukraine's sovereignty. The Russians had deployed paramilitary groups, ostensibly to defend what they mistakenly argued were both majority Russian-speaking areas from Ukraine-sponsored Azov Battalion attacks. These battalions had a long history of questionable political affiliation and were an irritant in the administration of a wider Ukraine. I understand that, following reorganisation, they now fall under Ukrainian government control. That was the position when, earlier this year, the Americans again proposed NATO membership. That threat provoked Putin, and he has skilfully used it to reinforce and justify his delusional dreams of a greater Russia.

During the two speaking tours to Russia that I made in the 1990s, I was constantly reminded of both the Russian preoccupation with a perceived external threat and the associated loss of 25 million in the Second World War. It is always there in the background

in talks with Russians. I understand that paranoia and Putin's ability to exploit it. Our mistake in the West has been to feed it by supporting a breach of the Cold War compromise—the maintenance of a string of non-nuclear, barrier, buffer states from Finland in the north to Georgia in the south, placating Russian concerns.

We have now entered a war of indefinite duration characterised by appalling atrocities: rape, indiscriminate murder, nuclear threat, destruction of property now estimated at more than \$350 billion and a winter siege threatening millions. In response we are sponsoring a proxy war over which we have ceded control, with ministerial statements offering indefinite equipment support. Russia's predictable response has been a news lockdown in Russia, escalating troop deployments and a land grab.

I strongly support NATO as the bedrock of our security; it has served us well. But I beg of the powers within its structures to seek wise counsel. Russia cannot persist in this madness. While we wait for compromise, there will be no winners. Millions worldwide are suffering from the consequences of this war.

My political friends—dwindling in number, I understand, over my position—believe the Russians always intended to occupy the Ukraine. I profoundly disagree. It wanted a non-nuclear, non-NATO, compliant barrier state. Incidentally, its eastern boundaries are only 300 miles from Moscow.

I believe there is room for compromise, and I have proposed the following since the beginning, earlier this year: the withdrawal of the Azov Battalions and Russian forces; the reversal of the decision banning official use of the Russian language in the Donbass; the recognition by Ukraine of separate regional status for two eastern provinces—one of which by majority is Russian speaking—and their retention as devolved regions under Ukraine's sovereignty; the rejection by NATO of Ukraine's application; and the retention of non-nuclear barrier status, as I have previously alluded to.

It is still not too late. Let us end this nightmare and start the talking. Russia will inevitably have to change and compromise. This war that we are pursuing is not helping the process.

4.19 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): My Lords, I welcome this more substantial debate on Ukraine and thank the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for securing it. Occasional Questions or short responses to government Statements do not really allow time to come properly to terms with what is happening in this war. Moreover, I sense that the understandable fascination with the military—including nuclear—aspects of the conflict does not really do justice to all its strategic complexity.

To a military mind, the conflict in Ukraine conforms to much of the thinking of the Government's recent integrated review. In a tactical sense, the conflict has crossed the threshold of formalised warfare and is now quite clearly both brutal and horrific. However, for the moment, at least, it is a war that is limited by both geography and the means employed. Keeping it that way must be one of the primary aims of international policy.

The situation in Ukraine also represents the tactical military dimension of a wider strategic conflict between Russia and those elements of the international community that support an established set of rules and values. That strategic conflict is not geographically limited and embraces a wide variety of what we call “attack vectors”, including, though not limited to, cyber, energy, food, economic sanctions, misinformation, political assassination and proxy terrorism.

I will offer three observations. First, in a military sense, we cannot afford to either win or lose the tactical battle. To attempt to win risks the military escalation that we must seek to avoid, while to lose risks a strategic moral defeat. We must, however, do more to keep Ukraine in the fight, since I fear that Russia still maintains an advantage in the means of production to sustain industrial-level warfare.

Secondly, the more difficult conflict is the strategic one: the one of international resilience in the face of the non-kinetic dimensions of the confrontation. That is also one that I worry Putin might still think he can win—or at least create the circumstances for an advantageous peace.

Thirdly, given that the non-kinetic dimensions of this conflict are not by-products of war but are most definitely the primary vectors of strategic attack, where is the Government's strategic narrative that explains this to the British people and demands of them the necessary sacrifices? I worry that wider society is currently completely confused by a set of toxic debates about Covid, Brexit and government economic incompetence, when the most significant factor in play in the cost of living crisis is that we are actually at war—but not a war of a variety that most people recognise.

4.22 pm

Baroness Meyer (Con): My Lords, President Biden recently commented that this is the most dangerous threat of nuclear war since the Cuban crisis. But are we entering a period of heightened danger, or is this Putin's way of signalling to the West that it is time to start negotiations? Since the beginning, Mr Putin has been playing poker. If he believes that the West will not back down, he will have to up the stakes. Putin once said, “We don't need the world without Russia”.

Getting Ukraine is Putin's obsession. He made that clear in his 2008 NATO speech and in his 6,000-word essay on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians. For him, the Maidan Revolution was led by Nazi putschists on behalf of Washington. As a result, war became inevitable.

Since 2020, Russia has become a totalitarian regime. Power within the system depends on access to the President, and the number of those with access has narrowed to a handful of associates. These men, known as siloviki, have enriched themselves during the 22 years of Putin's rule. They also believe that they are in an existential struggle against the West and that, if Putin goes, they lose everything. There is no chance they will back down now. The country could collapse at any moment, but there do not seem to be any cracks among his inner circle. His only critics are the hawks, like Kadyrov, the Chechen leader, or Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group, who advocate for tougher measures to win the war.

[BARONESS MEYER]

More strikingly, Putin has managed to weaponise the population so that they do not take to the street as they did in Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus. Putin relies on Dugin's ideas of a centuries-old conflict, with Russia bearing the divine role of preserving conservative values against the evil powers of the US and Britain, both of which have constantly sought to subdue Russia, from the great game to World War I, and to Vietnam and Afghanistan. This dogma was deployed on state-owned television and the media. With the population physically and ideologically exhausted, it has been easy to indoctrinate them, particularly the older generation.

One must not forget that anyone born before 1990 had, at the age of 12, to swear an oath to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

“to passionately love and cherish my Motherland, to live as the great Lenin bade us to, as the Communist Party teaches us to”

and as the laws of the pioneers of the Soviet Union required. It may no longer be an oath to Lenin, but the personality cult has been restored—to Tsar Putin. In the younger, better-informed generation, there is a general feeling that the previous 30 years have been cancelled, and that it is starting from zero. Everyone in the opposition defines themselves as anti-Putin. There is no competing belief structure to rally them. To this mix, we can add the notion of martyrdom: think of Dostoyevsky and the heroes of World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as the Russians call it.

The West may dream of Ukraine's victory and the collapse of Putin's regime, but Zelensky wants total victory and so does Putin. At this year's annual victory parade Putin declared, “We will never give up”. Negotiating for a peace deal seems nay impossible, particularly since the red lines are drawn around Crimea. If Ukraine attempts to retake that militarily, it will massively increase the risk of tactical strikes. What steps are His Majesty's Government taking to neutralise this nuclear threat?

My mother's family fled the Bolsheviks during the revolution. I have always hoped that Russia would one day be a friend but, under Putin, this will not be possible. We need to push further. Will His Majesty's Government go further and sanction the members of Mr Putin's regime who have supported this dreadful war?

4.27 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, I too thank and commend the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for instituting this important debate and for introducing it so profoundly.

Regrettably, we are all familiar with Putin's and his spokesperson's habit of using diplomatic relations like a cracked mirror, ascribing his own egregious intentions to others and therefore justifying aggression and escalations. From the start of this phase of the Ukraine conflict, it has had a nuclear component. In his declaration announcing the February invasion, Putin made statements warning the NATO powers of likely nuclear consequences should they choose to intervene. This nuclear blackmail appears to have, in limited terms, succeeded. NATO rejected Ukraine's pleas to institute a no-fly zone,

despite the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Parliaments all voting in favour. It should not be possible for a tyrant to use nuclear weapons as a shield to conquer his neighbours like this; that it is points to one of several deep injustices and risks baked into the systems that we have created.

There is no such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon. The use of any nuclear weapon would be strategic; all are appallingly destructive and present an existential risk. They are not merely political instruments or one of the sinews of diplomacy. The risk of nuclear weapons being used on a European battlefield is greater today than at any time since the height of the Cold War, and this risk is not just subject to the caprice of an increasingly unstable political actor who is acting against the backdrop of a decaying regime. It is also subject to error or miscalculation. In October 1962 off the coast of Cuba, a Soviet submarine commander, on hearing depth charges, wrongly inferred that war had broken out and gave orders to fire a nuclear weapon at US targets. He was prevented from so doing only by the last-minute intervention of the senior intelligence officer on board the boat. I and almost everyone I know owe our lives to this officer.

We know that the reliability and safety of all nuclear weapons are potentially vulnerable to cyber intrusion and increasingly to disruptive technologies. This war in Ukraine has already exposed the degraded nature of Russian arms and military infrastructure, a situation that only builds upon the fallibility inherent in human nature. The use of nuclear weapons is now contingent not just on the temperament of those responsible for them but on autonomous systems and evolving weapons technology. Nuclear weapons could be detonated by accident or interference and, given that the bonds of trust between Russia and the West are fraying more every day, how could we realistically impute a lack of malign intention, even were that the case?

In response to this evolving risk, the US Congress and President have separately initiated a comprehensive fail-safe evaluation of their nuclear weapons. What assessment have our Government made of the implications of this action by our most important ally, particularly on our confidence in the fail-safe resilience of our systems and on whether we will take their lead and conduct our own similar review?

We face a moment of enormous danger. What mechanisms do we have in place to bring this conflict to an end on terms that are acceptable to Ukraine? In modern warfare, there is no such thing as a conflict that can be won by purely military means. The best that combat can offer is to fashion a context within which an acceptable settlement can be reached. But, ultimately, there will have to be a set of terms to which both Ukraine and Russia will be prepared to accede if this war is to end. It is not for this Government, or any other western Administration, to attempt to dictate the timing of such negotiations; that is a matter for President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine. But, as the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, said only two weeks ago, we are reaching a time when the Russians would be negotiating from an adverse position, certainly in military terms and possibly in political terms as well.

This conflict has exposed the failures of a generation to grasp the opportunities after the Cold War to escape the global risk arising from our collective attachment to nuclear deterrence. This is not the time to look backwards; we now need to make a resolution to double down and realise the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, repeatedly expressed by representatives of the British Government and the non-proliferation treaty. When I sat on the Trident Commission alongside several colleagues from this House a decade ago, we concluded that the UK needed to do more to drive genuine multilateral disarmament. Unfortunately, what effort we have put in has not borne fruit, and the strategic situation has deteriorated further. The latest NPT review conference this August ended in failure.

We cannot simply step back and shrug our shoulders. As a nuclear weapon state and permanent member of the Security Council, we bear a special responsibility. While we rightly condemn the leadership in Moscow, we must also draw it or its successors into a constructive process that builds an inclusive European security arrangement, with strong and credible security guarantees for Ukraine. This is a fearsome challenge, perhaps more problematic than winning a war with Russia, but we owe it to ourselves, our children and our grandchildren to engage in it.

4.32 pm

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, we have heard a series of extremely thoughtful and well-considered speeches, which underlines the fact that we need a full day's debate on Ukraine very early in the new year.

If your Lordships had any doubt about the terrible things that we are facing, please go across to Portcullis House, where, within the parliamentary precinct, there is the most extraordinarily shocking exhibition of war crimes, opened by the brave Madam Zelenska only two days ago. However doubting you might be, that will reinforce that we face something evil. This is why I am particularly glad that this debate was introduced by a profound Christian thinker, the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, who has done so much for this country over so long.

We have to exploit modern contrivances—24-hour news and even social media, which I hate so much—to get across to the Russian people that they are not our enemy. Their enemy is their leader. We have to get across to them that they need fear nothing about their national security.

Both the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, and my noble friend Lady Meyer referred to the last war. Anybody who has been to Russia and talks to Russians knows that that spectre of the 27 million dead, which helped to mould their national character, will not go away, and they need to feel security. But the security that they need cannot be provided by a megalomaniac dictator. Somehow, we have to get this across to them, and to get it across to a people who have no infrastructure of democracy. Apart from the brief experiment before the Bolshevik revolution, they have lived in an absolutist regime for centuries, and they are living under a tsar now.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton of Richmond, was very wise when he talked about our being essentially careful as well as determined—careful

because a nuclear conflagration has no winner, and everyone is a loser. Equally, if Ukraine is defeated, we have all lost, because we have lost something that is essentially precious to us.

We all know that it is enormously complicated, but we have within your Lordships' House many like the noble and gallant Lord who have great personal experience and wisdom to offer. I hope that in another debate we will hear again from the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, who was such a splendid Secretary-General of NATO. We all need to come together very early in the new year and have a full-scale debate on the future of Ukraine, knowing that, at the end of the day, as has been said, negotiations will have to take place. Those negotiations must be such that not an inch of the territory occupied by Ukraine on 24 February falls into Russian hands permanently. There must be international guarantees, underwritten by the United Nations, perhaps with a European NATO peacekeeping force—there is no reason why the UN and NATO should not work together in this.

The stakes are very high—they have never been higher—but we must bring calm consideration, and I hope that this useful debate will be a beginning for another chapter of that.

4.37 pm

Lord Skidelsky (CB): My Lords, I am grateful, as we all are, to the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for initiating this debate and for drawing attention to the real danger of nuclear escalation.

I am in profound disagreement with the Government's policy on Ukraine—I have said it before in this House and I shall say it again. This disagreement can be stated in one sentence: the Government's policy is a war policy; I support a peace policy. I shall try to justify that.

The then Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, stated on 27 April:

“We will keep going further and faster to push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine.”

This policy has been repeatedly restated by government spokesmen. It is supported by the Opposition and echoed by the media.

In calling for peace, I may be an isolated voice in Britain, but not in the world. Everyone outside the NATO world is calling for negotiations and some within it—I draw attention to President Macron in particular. Let me try to be logical. The Government's policy makes sense on one assumption: that Ukraine, with NATO military support and economic sanctions on Russia, will soon complete the reconquest of Ukraine, including Crimea. In this case, there will be nothing to negotiate; the deed will have been done—it will have been accomplished.

I am not privy to secret military intelligence, but such evidence as I have, plus a dose of common sense, suggests that neither Russia nor Ukraine can achieve their war aims at the present level of hostilities, so the pursuit of victory is bound to bring escalation on both sides. Russia will intensify its air war, and NATO will provide Ukraine with more weapons to shoot down Russian aircraft. At what point such escalation leads

[LORD SKIDELSKY]

to the accidental or deliberate deployment of tactical nuclear weapons is anyone's guess, but the danger must be there, as the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, pointed out. That is why the war should be ended as soon as possible, and that can be done only by negotiations based on a ceasefire.

I utterly reject the premise underlying the Government's policy that it is up to Ukraine to decide if and when it wants to end the war. President Zelensky's policy is to get his "land back entirely". Of course, it is up to Ukraine to decide what to do, but we cannot give Ukraine *carte blanche* to determine its war policy when we are in fact providing it with the weaponry to continue the war at considerable sacrifice to our own people. The decisions for peace and war, and on what terms to end the war, must be taken by Ukraine and NATO jointly.

I have reached one conclusion which is more compatible with government thinking: that no meaningful negotiations are possible as long as President Putin remains in office and, more importantly, in power. It is not only that his personal prestige is too heavily implicated in an impossible object but that his attempt to achieve it is leading his country to disaster. His invasion of Ukraine has galvanised Ukrainian nationalism, expanded NATO, shifted the balance of power in Europe to its most anti-Russian eastern states, exposed hitherto hidden Russian military and technical weaknesses, subjected Russia to the most sweeping economic sanctions ever imposed, and provoked the emigration of many of the most talented Russian scientists, technicians, thinkers and artists. In sum, he has erected a new monument to imperfect and incompetent statesmanship.

Any settlement of the war which can inspire confidence in the future will require Mr Putin's departure from the scene. I do not know how this is to come about; it is beyond our control. However, we can offer an incentive: our Government can say that they would be willing to join our partners in serious negotiations to end the war with a new Russian Government. This negotiation would include the future status of Crimea and the dropping of sanctions. It would encourage forces within the Russian state to implement a change of government. This is a tough but constructive policy that I would understand and support; I do not understand the present policy in intellectual terms. It might not succeed, but it is infinitely better than the dangerous bellicosity we seem to be trapped in.

4.42 pm

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for securing this important and timely debate, and for his powerful introduction. The debate is, as always, excellent and informed.

On Tuesday, I had the very great privilege of being present when the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, addressed MPs and Peers. Some here this afternoon were also present on Tuesday. Like the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, I visited the exhibition in Portcullis House; it is indeed sobering.

The debate this afternoon has focused on the mechanics of war and the threat of nuclear weapons. Of the 19 speakers taking part, only two of us are women. It

can be said that war is a man's business, and certainly hand-to-hand combat is better suited to the physique of men, but it is the effect on the women of Ukraine that I wish to speak to this afternoon. The First Lady did not pull any punches when she spoke about the sexual abuse and rape which Russian soldiers were perpetrating on the women, girls and children of Ukraine. There is also evidence that civilians and Ukrainian soldiers were tortured before death by their invaders. All this is sanctioned by Moscow and Putin.

I have long been a champion of women and their ability and right to live the lives and careers they choose, some of which have traditionally been seen as the purview of men. However, only women can bear children, although very many men make excellent mothers. In the early days of a child's life, the main task of nurturing generally falls to the women. For these women in Ukraine, and previously for those in Bosnia, to see their homes, schools and villages bombed and destroyed is devastating; then to be sexually assaulted and raped by advancing enemy soldiers is soul-destroying—exactly as the enemy intended.

We have seen many television interviews and scenes of the women of Ukraine relating their horrific experiences and begging us to help them out. They are suffering, but they are not beaten. Their spirit is strong, and we must help them to maintain that strength and see this through to the end.

The First Lady asked those present on Tuesday, as representatives of the legislature of our country, to help Ukraine to bring the culprits to justice through successful convictions of war crimes against humanity. Putin has sanctioned these crimes, and Putin must pay. We have seen this week in America the person orchestrating the invasion of Capitol Hill, on the eve of the announcement of the results of the presidential election, being prosecuted. Even though he was not physically present at the event, he planned and executed the attack from afar and assembled those who would be prepared to disrupt the proceedings. It cannot, therefore, be impossible for the Russian war crimes in Ukraine to be brought to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. We, as a country, must pursue and support this happening.

I have heard the Minister speak in this Chamber on many occasions of his support for women and girls who are suffering persecution, torture and rape. He is a true champion of their cause. I therefore look forward to his comments on this debate and, in particular, on the plight of the women of Ukraine. Just as Radovan Karadžić was, in his turn, prosecuted for the crimes that his troops perpetrated in Bosnia, so Putin should be indicted for his crimes against the women of Ukraine.

4.47 pm

Lord Shinkwin (Con): My Lords, I too thank the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, for securing this crucial debate. On Tuesday, like the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, I was privileged to listen to Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine, when she addressed parliamentarians and then when she spoke at the exhibition on Russian war crimes in Portcullis House. Like the noble Baroness and my noble friend Lord Cormack, I was horrified by what I

heard and saw. Her courage was matched only by the unfathomable tragedy of the current situation, which she captured so poignantly in her words. For the exhibition is not just about the past nine or so months, or even the present; it is also about the future—the future suffering of her people until the barbarity of the Russians' criminal regime is brought to a halt and they have left the territory of Ukraine.

The images in the exhibition will one day comprise an historical record, but not yet. The war crimes being perpetrated by the Russians, who, as the First Lady told us, are individuals with faces and lives of their own, but no soul—all of it is happening in real time. The awful truth is that the exhibition on display in Portcullis House will grow to accommodate the images of horrors yet to be unearthed, perhaps yet to be committed. That is why it is so important that her appeal to us as the mother of Parliaments and the primary defender of democracy does not go unheeded. All she asked for is justice and the means, in the form of a tribunal, by which to secure it so that those who commit war crimes can be held to account—and that, critically, others can be deterred from doing so.

Madam Zelenska has presented us with a clear choice: either we bear witness to the truth that we have a common interest in challenging and arresting this regressive slide into depraved barbarity, which threatens the very foundations of free and civilised societies, or we wring our hands as if there is nothing we can do and no price to pay for inaction. Of course, no one could lay that charge at His Majesty's Government's door. It is to the immense credit of Boris Johnson that, as Prime Minister, he grasped both the enormity of the threat posed by Russia's illegal invasion and the scale of responsibility and self-interest we have in countering it. Rishi Sunak is absolutely right to continue his policy; he would also be absolutely right to give the First Lady's call for a tribunal his full support.

It is crucial that we consider the consequences were Madam Zelenska's cry for justice to go unheeded and such war crimes and even genocide to go unpunished. For as a species, we have a curious propensity to unlearn the lessons of history. But we cannot afford to forget Munich or be cowed into appeasement by the threat of nuclear weapons, whether tactical or strategic. We must hold our nerve.

I ask my noble friend the Minister to reassure the House that Madam Zelenska's visit will not have been in vain and that His Majesty's Government are already acting on her request for the UK to take the lead in establishing a tribunal for justice for Ukraine and for all those countries that believe in democracy and the self-determination of nations.

4.52 pm

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, I join the broad cross-party consensus in support of Ukraine. I say to my noble friend Lord Campbell-Savours and the noble Lord, Lord Skidelsky, that it would surely pose a very poor precedent if Russia were to be seen to gain from its illegal and unjustified intervention and emerge with some territorial advantage from that, contrary to the international undertakings that it has made for the last 10 or 15 years.

It is right that the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, has drawn attention to the danger of Putin's nuclear rhetoric and the threat to break what has been a taboo since 1945. Like the noble Lord, Lord Howell, I see the difficulty of drawing a distinction between battlefield nuclear and other forms of weapons, and see the great danger of escalation.

It is clear that much has changed as a result of both Crimea in 2014 and the invasion in February this year. It was only 20 or so years ago that I recall that there was even a Russian office at NATO headquarters, and we had the NATO-Russia Act. Much has changed since that time. This conflict will have seen the nature of modern warfare changed, with the use of drones even in naval warfare at Sevastopol. It will perhaps also lead to a revision of the western view of the quality of the Russian military.

Since the invasion of Crimea in 2014, it is good that we and other NATO countries have joined in training the Ukrainian forces. It is also right that NATO has emphasised that this is a matter for Ukraine of territorial defence, not of offence over the borders of Russia, and that we are not co-belligerents, but in support of a country that has been invaded. To that extent, NATO policy is absolutely right.

It is good too that America, as President Biden has said, is back. US forces have been extremely helpful. The hero of the conflict will probably be President Zelensky as a great leader of his own people. I say with respect to Yaroslavsky, that this is the Great Patriotic War of the people of Ukraine. Another hero, in my judgment, has been Secretary-General Stoltenberg, who has shown a steady hand at key moments. By contrast, President Putin will surely be judged by history to have massively miscalculated the effect of his invasion. That view he had of taking Kyiv in a few days was shared by many at NATO headquarters. Part of that miscalculation has been provoking Finland and Sweden to join NATO. We know that 28 of the 30 NATO countries have so far ratified and I understand that Hungary will have a debate on it on 7 December. Following moves made by Sweden, Finland is also moving, following the accord it reached in June. Will the Minister comment on the prospects, as seen by our Government, of the accession of Finland and Sweden?

I have two final observations. The first is that this is a clear invasion. It is most distressing that key countries such as China, for example, so keen on non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries, cannot see that invasion is the worst sort of interference. Of course, other Commonwealth countries, including India and South Africa, and many African countries are not in support.

Finally, what is the likely endgame and who will pay for reconstruction? Some say we should not humiliate Putin. In my judgment, so long as Russia is left with some territorial gains, it will be tempted to launch further attacks on Ukraine. One of the few certainties is that, at the end of this conflict, Russia and Putin will be weakened in strength and in reputation and that NATO, led by the US, is not brain-dead or irrelevant, but much stronger and more relevant.

4.57 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, President Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine has upended our own country's national security strategy, along with those of many other countries, particularly fellow European states. As our strategy is currently being reviewed and reset, this debate in the name of my noble and right reverend friend Lord Harries of Pentregarth could not be more timely or more welcome. I will focus my own remarks on the nuclear aspects of the Ukraine conflict, both military and civil.

It is a bitter irony that in the first days of 2022, the five legally recognised nuclear weapon states—China, France, Russia, the UK and the US—rather belatedly reaffirmed their support for the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that

“a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”.

A few weeks later, President Putin was threatening the possible use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state—indeed, one whose territorial integrity and sovereignty Russia had explicitly pledged to respect as part of the agreement by Ukraine to give up its Soviet-era nuclear weapons, known as the Budapest memorandum. Then, in August, Russia blocked the agreed conclusions of the UN's nuclear non-proliferation review conference. Perfidy does not come in much purer form than that.

We will know for certain only after this war has ended whether President Putin was merely sabre rattling or whether his remarks presaged something far worse. Let us hope that the unambiguous passage in the recent G20 communiqué:

“The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible” will have given him some thought. It was, of course, signed by the Chinese too.

Either way, President Putin will have put back on the table several key aspects of nuclear policy. First is whether a doctrine of “constructive ambiguity” on the use of nuclear weapons, as all members of the P5, including ourselves, currently maintain, is the best approach. There is nothing much constructive in Russia's interpretation of that doctrine and not much benefit from the ambiguity. It might be preferable to move to a “sole purpose” doctrine, meaning that nuclear weapons' only purpose is to deter their use by other nuclear weapon states.

Secondly, engagement with the whole issue of global strategic stability between nuclear weapon states will surely need to be resumed at some stage, drawing in the Chinese, whose nuclear arsenal is increasing by leaps and bounds; nor should we overlook the desirability of ensuring that the New START Treaty between the US and Russia on strategic nuclear weapons does not lapse and is, if possible, replaced by more constraining limits. There is also a need to look again at the question of intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe. While ensuring that Russia does not use nuclear weapons in or around Ukraine—it would be good to hear whether the UK, like the US, has conveyed any messages about the consequences of stepping across that line—this much wider agenda is coming towards us and we need to be ready for it.

There is another nuclear dimension to the Ukraine conflict: the need to safeguard civil nuclear installations in conflict zones. Both at Chernobyl in the early days after the invasion and at Zaporizhzhia, the site of the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, Russia has taken quite horrendous risks without any heed to the possible consequences. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, and his officials for the courage and professionalism they have shown in safeguarding those installations. I hope the Minister agrees with that and, if he does, will convey our collective thanks to the IAEA. Do we think that the international rules and conventions governing vulnerable civil nuclear sites in conflict zones are sufficient, or does experience in Ukraine show that they need, over time, to be strengthened and supplemented? This will not be the last occasion on which civil nuclear power stations find themselves in conflict zones.

I realise that some of the nuclear issues raised by the conflict in Ukraine are extraordinarily sensitive and not easy to handle in open debate, but we surely need to be thinking about and getting ready to engage with them.

5.03 pm

Lord Balfé (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble and right reverend Lord on securing this debate. I will probably disappoint most noble Lords, because I am much nearer to the noble Lords, Lord Skidelsky and Lord Campbell-Savours, than to many of the things that have been said this afternoon. I have not been in Ukraine for some years—six, to be exact—but I was there in the 1990s and the early years of this century. I got to know ex-President Kuchma quite well and had several discussions with him about the evolution of Ukraine.

My first point is this: be careful what you wish for. How on earth have we got into such a position with Russia? It is a tragedy. We are using huge amounts of western military equipment to destroy Ukraine—not Russia. It is all being fired around Ukraine and ruining the country.

Secondly, everybody, including most Russians, accepts that the invasion was a massive misjudgment. The intelligence given to the Russian leadership was seriously defective and the amount of corruption in the Russian military seriously underestimated. The Russians are now facing an impossible situation, because they probably cannot pull back—they cannot leave and cannot stay.

We also need to remember that, as happens in many countries—and indeed happened in Britain in the Second World War—when you get the country on a war footing, people tend to rally behind the Government. My friends in Russia tell me that one of the biggest difficulties they have now is that it is very difficult to criticise the Government internally, because there is a general feeling of patriotism, particularly among the elderly: “We have to back our Government; we are all under attack”.

I think we have difficulties here. We conspired to make the Minsk agreements fail; there is no doubt about that. We did not put the effort in and, if noble Lords look through *Hansard*, they will see that I have made that point on several occasions over the years.

We talk about taking Russia to court, but who is going to take it there? Russia has a veto in the Security Council. Do noble Lords think that the Security Council is going to set up a body that works? Do they think that the Russians are going to pay if people tell them to? No, they are not. If we confiscate Russian assets in the West, the likely outcome will be a selling-off of US treasuries by countries that will say, “Are we going to be next? Is our money safe?” The answer is no. If they can do this to Russia, they can do it to China. We could actually precipitate a very difficult world financial crisis, and we need to be very careful about that.

Finally, we have somehow to get negotiations going—and only we can do that. While we are prepared to put unlimited amounts of military hardware into Ukraine for the Ukrainians to use against the Russians, they will do so, because it is very difficult also for them to step back. Their population is as much behind Zelensky as the Russian population is, overall, behind Putin. So the only way we are going to move things forward is by having backing from Macron and a decisive peace initiative to try to get both sides to the table—the Russians on the grounds that they cannot win, and the Ukrainians on the grounds that they cannot win without us and we are not willing to support an eternal war.

5.08 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, for my birthday last month, one of my best friends from university presented me with a book, *A Message from Ukraine*, by Volodymyr Zelensky. On the back cover is a picture of President Zelensky in his khaki/olive-green T-shirt, and a quote from him:

“One day soon, loved ones will be together again. Our flag will fly over the occupied cities again. Our nation will be reunited and there will be peace again. And the world will no longer dream in black and white. It will only dream in blue and yellow.”

I was introduced to His Excellency Vadym Prystaiko, the Ukrainian ambassador, in the middle of the pandemic by the noble Baroness, Lady Meyer. We had a Zoom call, the objective of which, while I was president of the CBI—the Confederation of British Industry—was to see what we could do to increase trade, business and investment between the UK and Ukraine. Little did the three of us know then what would transpire just a short while later, on 24 February 2022.

Just over two months after the war started, on 5 May, we at the CBI supported the Ukrainian ambassador at a fundraising event at the Tate Modern, attended by the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with a live address by President Zelensky from Kyiv. There was an exhibition at the Tate Modern, the theme of which was bravery. It was inspirational.

I thank my noble and right reverend friend Lord Harries for initiating this debate. At the end of the G20 summit in Bali on 16 November, some people argued that it was significant that China had agreed to the G20 leaders’ declaration, which included the condemnation of the war in Ukraine. It stated:

“The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible.” Speaking after the summit, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, said that China had an “important role” in putting pressure on Russia to avoid the use of

nuclear weapons. I ask the Minister directly: what would the UK or NATO do if Putin used a nuclear weapon or dirty bomb? How would we react?

On 2 April 2019, I spoke in this House in the debate on the 70th anniversary of NATO. I quoted Lord Ismay, the first Secretary-General of NATO. He said NATO’s objective was to

“keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down”.

I continually say to our Government that, even if we are in a period of peace, uncertainty is always there. Things come out of the blue. No one predicted 9/11 and no one predicted what happened this February. I said in that debate that we should spend 3% of our GDP on defence. Would the Minister agree?

Soon after the war started, I was asked by the EU ambassador to address the 27 EU country ambassadors. I asked the Finland and Sweden ambassadors directly, “Will you now join NATO?” They said, “We are ready to join in five minutes”. They have now agreed to join and NATO is strengthened.

Since 24 February, the CBI has been helping the Ukrainian ambassador and helping Ukraine. Not only has business stopped doing business with Russia but we have given monetary donations, millions of ration packs and hundreds of thousands of food boxes—all evidence of business as a force for good. In May, at the CBI annual dinner, the Ukrainian ambassador asked whether I knew about the blockade on the port of Odessa. He said that if it was not unblocked, the grain would not flow. Then David Beasley, the executive director of the UN’s food programme, reported in May that, unless we unblocked the Odessa port, we could have 47 million people facing acute hunger around the world. Could the Minister give us an update on the deal struck between the UN and Turkey, which thankfully is now allowing the ships to flow?

I conclude by saying that today, hot off the press, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has called out to Vladimir Putin to end the war and stop weaponising food supplies. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* as India takes over the G20 presidency, he warned that geopolitical struggles could

“lead to humanitarian crises”.

He said that

“our era need not be one of war. Indeed, it must not be!”

The *Telegraph* states:

“On the sidelines of a summit in Uzbekistan in September, he told the Russian leader that now was ‘not a time for war’.”

I conclude by saying that having been a Member of this House for 16 years, one of my most memorable days was 8 March, when we adjourned this House for the first joint sitting of both Houses in the House of Commons to hear President Zelensky address us live. He quoted Shakespeare and said:

“‘To be, or not to be’ ... it is definitely, ‘To be’.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 8/3/22; col. 304.]

5.13 pm

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I have a question to ask your Lordships. What happened to the air war in Ukraine? We have heard that Putin invaded with armoured columns. Presumably, he took a lesson from the United States and the coalition that went

[LORD HAMILTON OF EPSOM]
into Iraq. That was the greatest demonstration of blitzkrieg we have seen in military history. First, the coalition forces went in and absolutely assured air superiority. They wanted air superiority and ended up with air supremacy. Why did that not happen in Ukraine? As my noble friend Lord Balfe said, clearly the intelligence that Putin was working with was pretty bad, but it seems to be extraordinarily bad tactically to go in on six different fronts simultaneously if you want to indulge in blitzkrieg.

Even then, however, something very odd did not happen, which was that there was never an air war in advance of this armoured invasion of Ukraine. It seems that the Russians were incapable of making sure that air superiority took place; there have been dogfights since but, to be quite honest, it has not happened. We therefore have to ask ourselves what the Russians were lacking that they could not make sure that there was air superiority for them in Ukraine. The answer is technology. They are miles behind on avionics, their aircraft are generations behind the F35, and, for a very long time, we have vastly overestimated their military capabilities.

What this means, of course, is that we have the option to bring this war to an end, but we do not. Why not? That is because, as your Lordships have been discussing today, we are worried that Putin might use tactical nuclear weapons. I will tell your Lordships why he is not going to. It is not because he is worried about escalation and the nuclear Armageddon that President Biden has threatened him with. The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, asked whether there is a hotline to the Kremlin. I read in my newspapers that the CIA constantly talk to the Kremlin. I will tell your Lordships what they will have told them: "We're not prepared to exchange one nuclear attack for another because we don't know where that will end. What we will do is hit you with the biggest conventional response you have ever seen in your life." That means the F35, which is technically so superior to any other aircraft in the world today that it could ensure that the whole of Ukraine was completely dominated from the sky, and at that stage we could annihilate any Russian forces in Ukraine at our will.

As we have already discussed, there is no consensus in NATO for this to happen. Okay, so we do nothing. We have the capacity to win this war decisively for the Ukrainians but we decide to do nothing. In the meantime, in this proxy war, the Ukrainians go on losing civilians, having atrocities committed on their people. Quite harmless bystanders get murdered constantly, their soldiers get killed and we stand by and do absolutely nothing, when we have the capability to bring this war to an end. Why? It is because we are so frightened that Putin might use nuclear weapons.

I can tell your Lordships now that he is not going to use nuclear weapons. He never will, and the reason is that the West would be forced to react. If you allow him to use them once, they can be used anywhere in the world as part of a conventional attack anywhere, and every country in the world would be in danger. Therefore he will not use them, but we are being drawn into his plot of thinking that he might. Therefore, we are shying away from taking the action that we could,

which is to ensure that we bring this awful war to an end within a few weeks with massive support into Ukraine.

5.18 pm

Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood (CB): My Lords, I echo the tributes already paid to my noble and right reverend friend Lord Harries.

I decided to put my name down for this debate having seen two things on Sunday. The first was a piece in the *Sunday Times*, no doubt applauded by the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, which said that although the West has frozen \$350 billion worth of Russian assets, none of it is available to start paying the, as it happens, roughly equivalent figure necessary by way of reparations to repair some of the devastation that Russia has wrought in Ukraine in this bestial war of theirs.

Secondly, there was a most interesting broadcast on BBC Two by Simon Sharma, which discussed the brutalising effects of totalitarianism on the bodies, minds and spirits of the population, the potentially liberating effects of artistic endeavours which expose and challenge those tyrannies, from people such as Picasso—one pictures "Guernica"—George Orwell, Václav Havel and Pasternak, and why these sorts of people come into it. I strongly recommend this programme to your Lordships.

I also recommend a film from 2019 which I was only alerted to recently, "Mr Jones". It is the true story of a brave young Welsh journalist who, in 1933, disbelieving the story of the triumphant success of Stalin's economic policies, goes to Moscow, slips his Intourist leash, goes to Ukraine and finds the devastation, the starvation, the ghastly effects of this policy. I remind your Lordships that Stalin once again is a revered figure in present-day Russia.

There can be only one acceptable outcome to this war. It is essential not only for the future of Ukraine and its security but for the future of the West and democracy itself. Russia certainly must not be seen to win and therefore must be seen to lose this war. That must be recognised internationally if not domestically in Russia. Putin cannot remain on the scene ideally. No doubt he will be in some war crimes tribunal.

How is this to be achieved? Certainly, Ukraine must recover its original borders. There are deep and difficult questions about the future status of Crimea. There are many arguments, and it may be up for grabs, but NATO must guarantee Ukraine's integrity, save for, conceivably, Crimea. I am much indebted to the Library note, which unsurprisingly suggests that the greatest possible risk, of any nuclear force, although it is still unlikely, would be if Russia were on the brink of defeat in the land war. However, if you recognise that this war against Russia must be won, that point must inevitably come, and the sooner the better, because every week and month of this conflict that passes, Ukrainians are suffering most desperately and outrageously, as has been described.

We should be taking this war to Russia at least to this extent. We should not only be doing everything conceivable to strengthen Ukraine's defence of its own territory against these ghastly infrastructures strikes but supplying Ukraine so that they can attack the

infrastructure necessary in Russia to support the Russian land forces. It would not be mirroring the war crime of attacking their civilian population so as to kill its morale, but stopping the supplies from reaching the land force and keeping it going. We should also be targeting whatever launch sites there are on ships in the Black Sea and on the Crimea launch pads of the incoming missiles. That far we should be going.

5.23 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, I stand before you a rather substandard substitute for my noble friend Lady Smith, whom I am afraid has caught the dreaded Covid. In our brief conversation, which was mainly coughing and was continued by text, it was quite clear that we will miss her wisdom on this.

It has become quite clear in this debate that there is some degree of consensus that Russia should not be allowed to march into a neighbouring state and say, "I'm in charge." My Russian history is old and rather ropery, but there is a horrible quotation that the borders of Russia, at any point in history, are exactly where the Russian Army has put them. I had rather hoped that those days were behind the Russian state. Briefly, in about 1990, we all thought that we were heading into a new age, when Russia would become the state that we would or had come to recognise, not something that is constantly expanding and contracting as its armies win and lose battles.

All nations are in the habit of forgetting that they lose wars. Our own history books are as guilty as anybody else's: to look at popular history you would think that we won the Hundred Years' War, but we are out of France. Nations lose and contract. They also survive and often strengthen because of it. The fact that the Russian leadership cannot accept that its empire has effectively been driven back to its heartlands means that we have somebody who is very difficult to deal with—somebody who wants to be a second-rate Peter the Great. It is worth remembering that it is said that St Petersburg is built on the bones of 100,000 serfs, and that does not count the people who died in his wars with Sweden and Turkey.

The glamorisation of war seems embedded in this view and is something that we must remember when we talk about great strategic tactics and swinging backwards and forwards. I hope we all listened very carefully to my noble friend Lady Bakewell's speech about women in particular and the atrocities committed in war. Making sure that Ukraine is allowed to survive and remain safe must be an objective. I hope we can take some action against those who have allowed the atrocities that are listed in the middle of Portcullis House to happen—and indeed those who committed them, but those who allowed them are probably more important.

If such action takes place, I hope it does so under the rule of law. We must remember that, if we apply these standards, we must apply them the whole way through. I hope the Government will assure us that they will work towards the survival of Ukraine, that any settlement will be done under the rule of law, and that people will accept that that is a must. We do not want to end up being a mirror of Russia on any level

—even a blurred and badly reflected one. We must not do it; it must be done under the legal norms that we embrace.

As the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, said about the danger of nuclear weapons, I and, I think, virtually everybody in the Chamber grew up with the domino theory that they start small, then we get slightly bigger bangs and slightly nastier outcomes, and then it builds. I think that many people have said this was probably always some sort of myth or gateway to a nightmare—you cannot expect that to happen. The noble Lord, Lord Browne of Ladyton, put his finger on it when he pointed to what I would call the cock-up school of history. Accidents happen. If we want to scare ourselves, we talk about the near misses of the Cold War. I think that Russia once mistook geese for incoming nuclear missiles on a radar screen. These things have happened, and we have just about managed to step away from them. Can the Government once again give us a real assurance that there is constant interaction between us, our NATO allies—particular those with nuclear capacity—and Russia to try to make sure that, if we are all going to a fiery hell, we do not go there by accident? I cannot ask the Minister for any more details because I doubt very much he has them—nor should he give them to me if he does—but can he give an assurance that communication is constantly happening?

On the consequences of even limited strikes, we have just had a solution of a conventional retaliation that might be possible, but who knows? Remember that the Russians were supposed to be able to walk straight into Ukraine and take it over. It does not do to underestimate your enemy.

We are going to have some degree of constant realisation that we are in a very bad place. It is not only that we have a recession, but others are going to be colder this winter than they ever expected to be. A way of monitoring and being ready for the opportunity to end it is something I think we can have.

I have one or two other smaller points. Something that was hinted at by the noble Baroness, Lady Meyer, is golden visas. We had a review in 2018, I think, and that is a while back now. Can the Government publish, or at least let us know when they will be publishing, the outcome of that because, apparently, we have had a review and we have not published it. The Wagner Group strikes me as mercenaries with an appalling record. Are we going to brand it a terrorist organisation? It would be a reasonable thing to do from what I have seen. These small steps are part of conveying to Russia and the Russian people that what is going on is totally unacceptable. That is an important part of what we can do. We can talk here about grand military strategy, but these small steps are important in building up the background music.

In Syria, Russia decided that pounding cities to the ground was a good way to win. It was right, but at hideous cost. The only thing that I can say about that is that we have got to engage with Russia and try whenever we can to get to the people. What I think has scared Putin most is the fact that, when he tried try to mobilise his army, large parts of his population left. That is surely something we can at least use as a lever.

[LORD ADDINGTON]

Nuclear weapons may be one end of it, but when your population turns round and says “Great, wonderful, but I ain’t going” you have real trouble.

5.32 pm

Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on two related issues. One is real and present, the unlawful invasion of Ukraine, and the other is, we all hope, simply a hypothetical threatened use of tactical nuclear weapons by Putin. I understand the most reverend Primate is currently in Kyiv to meet leaders of Ukraine’s churches, refugees and those who have been internally displaced. This is tremendous leadership, and I am sure that act of solidarity will be appreciated.

Back in your Lordships’ House, we have heard from a number of speakers who have raised important and valuable points. The formal Opposition has a curious role at this point of trying to review the whole debate, pick out people on our side and praise them and pick out people on the other side and say they are wrong. This is very different from that. The debate today has been of extreme quality, and I do not think it is safe to comment on the various points of view from this Official Opposition position. This is the most serious thing in front of this country at the moment. There were some pretty serious other things in front of this country, but this could have the most appalling outcome. This debate had subtlety, ambiguity and complexity.

Chilcot did a review of the Iraq war. I am told it is 2.9 million words long. I was charged with trying to précis it in a morning. I think I made a reasonable fist of it because I think he said only two things. One is that decision-making should be by a pluralistic process where all ideas are tested. I hope the decision-makers in this process will follow that advice and that the reading that they do before those discussions will include this debate and the ideas that have come up. I take the point that we must keep on having these debates. The various ideas may not be where we end up, but they all need to be tested against where we all came up.

The second thing Chilcot said is that when you start something, you should have some sort of plan as to what to do next. That seems to be one area where we can gently criticise the Government. There is a need to bring out a better understanding of where the thinking is going.

It has now been 281 days since Russian forces first invaded Ukraine, on 24 February, escalating a war that dated back almost exactly eight years to when Russia annexed Crimea. We will not know the true damage of this escalation until it is over, but we can be sure that thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people have been killed or wounded, and many more have had their lives severely impacted by the illegal and terrible actions of Putin’s Russia.

I pay tribute to the bravery, skill and fortitude of the Ukrainian forces, who are the main reason why the unprovoked, premeditated invasion is not only illegal but misguided. Russia has failed to achieve its objectives. I cannot remember which Peer emphasised this point, but I have been exposed to traditional military thinking

in this country and in NATO, and it was very much that when the Russians come they will overwhelm us, certainly for the first few days. The falsehood of that, and of our past assumptions, has been well brought out by this war.

The resolve of the alliance against Russia has only strengthened. Indeed, in recent months Ukraine has conducted a major counteroffensive with much success, taking back territory in the north-east, the east and Kherson region in the south. It is also believed that Russia has now exhausted, or almost exhausted, its supply of Iran-sourced one-way attack UAVs. In the last 24 hours, Ukraine claims to have killed approximately 500 Russian soldiers, destroyed three more tanks and six armoured personnel carriers, and downed three Russian reconnaissance drones.

However, it is of course not all positive, and Russian forces have made efforts to advance in eastern Ukraine, as well as training fire from tanks, mortars and artillery on Kherson following the Russian withdrawal from and Ukrainian liberation of the city early last month. Civilian infrastructure is also under heavy attack. The most recent Defence Intelligence update, shared today, highlights continued Russian attempts to disrupt Ukraine’s electrical grid, using cruise missiles, to demoralise the population. These strikes, which began in October, have caused power shortages leading to indiscriminate suffering across the country. However, stores of suitable missiles have been depleted, and the fact that this has taken place nine months into the invasion has reduced its effectiveness.

As Ukrainians continue to defend their homeland, we must continue to do all we can to support them, especially through the difficult winter months. The Government have rightly been given much credit for the support shown, and they will know that we—the Labour Official Opposition—fully support this continuing. The UK’s Armed Forces have done a tremendous job for which we should all be grateful, co-ordinating military and humanitarian support, reinforcing our allies on NATO’s eastern flank and providing training here at home through Operation Interflex. However, it should be said that most of the support we have provided, primarily the donation of weapons, has been presented through ad hoc announcements rather than a long-term strategy. While this is understandable in the early stages, we do not know how long this war will last and it shows no sign of coming to an end, so we must rethink our approach.

The Government have previously offered assurances that there is a long-term plan in place. The commitment to at least match the £2.3 billion spent is very welcome but we are keen to see more evidence of the long-term thinking. Part of that will include how we restock the supplies that have been donated, particularly through new contracts to replenish the next generation of light anti-tank weapons. To date, the approach has been rather opaque.

We must also consider humanitarian support. As well as the £2.3 billion I have just mentioned, the Government have committed to underwrite and grant at least £1.5 billion of humanitarian and fiscal aid to Ukraine through the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. That is

also welcome, although it is in disappointing contrast to how the Government have treated the rest of the aid budget. We will be very keen to hear how that money will be used and to be given an opportunity to scrutinise it to ensure that it is used as effectively as possible. We must also encourage other allies to follow our lead robustly.

Putin's nuclear rhetoric is the action of a pariah state. His threats are reckless and should be condemned, not just by the UK and our allies but by all states. The situation is serious but we should remain focused on what is actually happening in Ukraine, despite the threats and distortions coming from the Kremlin. Now is not the time to weaken or dilute our support.

5.41 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords for their participation in this important debate. I pay tribute to the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for tabling this debate and for his work in this respect.

I agree with my noble friend Lord Cormack—the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton of Richmond, also reminded us of this—about the importance of debating these issues. While we have domestic challenges, undoubtedly this is the real test and challenge of our time, given its implications for our energy security and food security. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Tunnicliffe, for his strong support. This illegal war in Ukraine seems to have been going on for an eternity, yet it started only in February.

In welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Addington, I am sure I speak for the whole House when I say we all missed the presence of the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham. He has done an admirable job but we wish her well as she recovers from Covid.

My noble friend Lord Balfe said that he has not been to Ukraine for a while. I went to Ukraine just over 12 months ago, after our incredible and inspirational ambassador, Melinda Simmons, invited me as part of my responsibilities to mark the memorial at Babi Yar to the 33,000-plus Jews shot by the Nazis in 1941. There is an irony in that: they were buried by Soviet prisoners of war. I was shocked to my core when Melinda WhatsApped me and said, “Minister, the very memorial you visited on 3 March was subject to a Russian missile”. That brought home the shocking nature of the false premise of the “denazification” of Ukraine as a justification for war—and let us not forget that President Zelensky's own heritage is also Jewish—which is also the false basis for Mr Putin's so-called reasoning behind liberating Russian-speaking parts of a sovereign nation. That is wrong and it must be held back.

The noble Lords, Lord Skidelsky and Lord Campbell-Savours, and my noble friend Lord Balfe again talked for peace. I agree with them. But peace is attainable only if the aggressor recognises that you cannot invade a country and seek to take the spoils of war, as the noble Lord, Lord Addington, reminded us. Mr Putin has brought back to our continent war on a scale not seen since Winston Churchill's time, with consequences that will be felt—I agree with all noble Lords on this—in the world for years to come. That I think was a thread in all contributions.

The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, reminded us about Prime Minister Modi's recent article, which I read, about the opportunities for the G20. We continue to work with key partners, not just our traditional allies. Like him, I believe that India has an important role in the eventual peace that we all desire.

However, Mr Putin believes that he can claim a victory through oppression, coercion and disinformation. Rightly, the message sent from this debate is a clear one: with one or two notable exceptions, we stand united. I thank both noble Lords who spoke from the Front Benches about not just our condemnation but our support for the Ukrainian nation and its people. I thank again the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for bringing this to bear.

My noble friend Lord Hamilton and the noble Lord, Lord Addington, along with the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, related to us the importance of communication. As we saw with the missile that landed in Poland, there can be unintended consequences and an escalation, perhaps not through intent but by accident. I am limited in what I can say, as the noble Lord, Lord Addington, acknowledged, but what I can share is that all the P5, notwithstanding differences, continue to recognise the importance of robust cross-communication mechanisms as a key element in ensuring crisis prevention and de-escalation. These are of course further things that we share through our membership of key alliances, including NATO.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton of Richmond, said that we need a clear narrative on dealing with this issue, including with our own domestic audience. I agree, which is why this House and the Government—indeed, all of us—need to make the consistent case for the necessity of standing firm in our support for Ukraine at this time. We have rightly united behind Ukraine in its fight for freedom and self-determination with sanctions, aid, military support and, ultimately, a clear determination to hold Mr Putin to account. The Ukrainian people, with our support, have pushed Mr Putin's army back, as we saw recently. I agree totally with the noble Lord, Lord Anderson, that we must continue to work in assisting Ukrainian forces—a point that resonated from many noble Lords who contributed.

Ukraine is regaining its sovereign territory from Russian control; last month, Russia experienced a further strategic setback as Ukraine took back the key city of Kherson. But we cannot be complacent because Russia will regroup and attack. Mr Putin tried to reverse the momentum by holding sham referenda and attempting to annex four Ukrainian territories. He has been forced to resort to a so-called partial mobilisation, provoking further opposition among the Russian people, despite his authoritarian grip.

I agree with my noble friend Lord Cormack: our fight is not with the Russian people. As was noted during the debate, when forced conscription was suddenly applied, many young Russian men fled. Yet Russia and Mr Putin have been unrelenting in launching a wave of indiscriminate attacks on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. Tragically, we see how alliances are built: these attacks included using Iranian-supplied drones to launch indiscriminate attacks against civilian

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]
and energy infrastructure. On 15 November there was one of the heaviest attacks since the war began. Wave upon wave of missiles—more than 80—were fired at Ukrainian cities on one single day. This destroyed homes and critical infrastructure, depriving millions of Ukrainians of power when winter is setting in. The brutal air campaign is Mr Putin's cowardly response to Ukraine's successes on the battlefield, where Russian forces have been expelled from thousands of square miles of territory. The continued bombardment of civilians demonstrates little commitment to peace.

I alluded to the tragic incident in Poland, the full details of which remain unclear. We continue to support Poland and other NATO members as they seek to establish facts and be secure in their defence. It is clear that the only reason that missiles are flying through European skies today is Russian action. It is an unwarranted aggression, and it is unacceptable.

My noble friend Lord Cormack and the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville, talked about the recent visit of the First Lady of Ukraine, Madam Zelenska, whom I met. Earlier this week, I had the huge honour of heading and hosting the conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict, at which the First Lady of Ukraine spoke. She shared many reflections on information she had of Russian women advising their husbands and boyfriends who were serving on the front line with the Russian forces to go ahead and weaponise rape. That puts things into perspective. For those who have heard the testimonies of those who have fallen victim to sexual violence in conflict, it is abhorrent. The practices are widespread, and there are ever-increasing and chilling tales of the abuse of young women and girls.

I learned about the violence that can spread through this particular weaponisation of war from the incredible Dr Mukwege, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who runs the Panzi Hospital in Congo. He is on the front line and has helped survivors of sexual violence. When I visited recently with her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex, who is playing an incredible convening role on this issue, Dr Mukwege said that there was a four year-old girl who was a victim of sexual violence. Her body was broken, and she saw that every man was a threat. The shrill shriek of her voice remains with him but, sadly and tragically, she was not the youngest victim that Dr Mukwege has had to deal with: the youngest was only six months old. What possesses a man to commit these kinds of abhorrent crimes against a young child is beyond comprehension. Yet the reality of the war in Ukraine is that these crimes are taking place on our very continent.

It is therefore right that we will not be deterred from supporting Ukraine. I appreciate the support in this debate, and I gently say to the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, that Russia is the aggressor and must withdraw. It can stop this war today if it so chooses. Mr Putin is not fooling anyone.

On what my noble friend Lord Balfe said about countries and support, let us be clear. I am the Minister for the United Nations, and I know how diplomatic efforts at times return rewards and present challenges. But, in October—just over a month ago—143 countries,

or three-quarters of the membership of the United Nations, voted unequivocally to condemn the annexation of Ukrainian territory. Russia should be judged by its friends. Who supported it? Syria, Belarus, Nicaragua and North Korea did. Need I say more? The United Kingdom is therefore proud to stand with the international community and for freedom and democracy. I assure our Ukrainian friends, as I assured Madam Zelenska, that we will stand united in support of the cause.

Noble Lords referred to nuclear threats. My noble friend Lord Howell rightly reminded us of the importance of coming together and, with his wisdom, also reminded us of the importance of working with countries such as China, with whom we have disagreements. But in front of us on the global stage there are important issues, such as climate change and, most importantly, the current war, to which China also needs to be united in its response. We welcome China's recent statement opposing the use of or threat of using nuclear weapons. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, who speaks with great insight from his time at the United Nations as a distinguished ambassador. It seems odd that it was only on 3 January this year that P5 members signed their commitment to the *Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races*, and we therefore welcome Russia's recent statement, on 2 November, reaffirming its commitment to this.

My noble friend Lord Hamilton and the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, also asked about the consequences. We and the G7 have been clear that any use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences. It is not our policy to outline hypothetical responses, so I can say no more than that. I assure noble Lords that NATO will not pre-empt our response to a nuclear attack on Ukraine, but if there was one—which I hope and pray there will not be, and I believe that common sense will prevail—of course it would fundamentally change the nature of the conflict and mean a very important line had been crossed. Let me be clear: NATO does not seek confrontation with Russia in this respect.

The noble Lord, Lord Browne, speaking with great insight from his time as a former Defence Secretary, knows well that UK actions ensure that we are dynamic in our response and the effectiveness of our deterrent remains strong. I assure the noble Lord and the whole House that the capability and effectiveness of the UK's independent nuclear deterrent are not in doubt.

Since the start of the war in February, we have committed £2.3 billion in military support to Ukraine. I hear what my noble friend Lord Hamilton said on that. Alongside the United States, we have matched and will continue to support that spending next year.

My noble friend Lady Meyer talked about the importance of support to Ukraine in its own capability. I can share with her that the UK trained more than 22,000 Ukrainian soldiers before the war and has now trained more than 9,000 of the 10,000 new recruits. We will continue to support them.

The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, asked about air defences. On 16 November, Defence Ministers and chiefs of defence staff of dozens of countries discussed further enhancing support for

Ukraine's air defence. The UK has already provided approximately 1,000 surface-to-air missiles to help Ukraine to counter the Russian threat. It will provide a major new package of air defence to help protect Ukrainian civilians and critical national infrastructure. The £50 million package of defence aid comprises 125 anti-aircraft guns and technology to counter deadly Iranian-supplied drones. It includes dozens of radars and anti-drone electronic warfare capability. We have also committed £220 million of humanitarian support since February, making us the third-largest donor.

The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, rightly asked about the grain deal. In this, I pay tribute to the United Nations but also to our NATO friend and ally, Turkey. As of 13 November, we had seen 11.7 million metric tonnes of grain and other foodstuffs exported from the Ukrainian Black Sea ports. Some 50% of all products exported and 65% of wheat exported have gone to low and middle-income countries. That is playing its role in alleviating the acute food crisis elsewhere, in countries such as Ethiopia, Yemen and Afghanistan. We welcome the fact that this deal has recently been renewed until the early part of next year.

On 14 November, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary signed an MoU to transfer the first £5 million of the UK's £10 million commitment to the Energy Community's Ukraine energy support fund to help Ukraine's efforts to repair energy infrastructure. The UK is also supporting Ukraine's economic stability through £74 million of direct budget support. We have worked to unlock £1.3 billion of additional World Bank and EBRD lending support.

My noble friend Lady Meyer asked specifically about sanctioning. I assure her that we are sanctioning. Working together with our partners in the G7, the EU and the United States, we have now sanctioned 1,200 individuals including 130 oligarchs with a net worth of around £140 billion. We have also sanctioned 386 members of the Russian Duma. That underlines our strong commitment.

The UK is also working with our allies to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. From 5 December, as I announced during a statutory instrument debate, there will be a ban on UK ships transporting Russian oil. The issue was rightly raised by my noble friend Lord Shinkwin, the noble Lord, Lord Addington, and the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, whom I thank for her kind remarks.

I assure noble Lords that we are supporting the Ukrainian authorities to investigate these atrocities. In May, together with the EU and the US, we launched the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group to support Ukraine's investigations and prosecutions. We have provided £2.5 million of funding and have led 42 other countries in referring atrocities committed in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court. The ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, was present at the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict conference, and recently both the Foreign Secretary and I met with him directly to discuss the various proposals. I say to my noble friend Lord Shinkwin that we are carefully considering the call for a special tribunal on Ukraine. It is right that we stand firmly to ensure that all crimes are investigated, particularly the abhorrent crimes of sexual violence.

Many noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Skidelsky and Lord Campbell-Savours, said rightly that they want to see an end to this conflict, as everyone does. Ukraine and partners seek a diplomatic solution to the war. Ukraine has put out a 10-point plan, but Russia has shown no interest in good-faith negotiations. Mr Putin has made it clear that negotiations will not include the territories he has attempted to annex illegally; that cannot be the right starting premise. I assure noble Lords that the UK, together with our partners, will work with Ukraine to provide lasting and long-term diplomatic, military and economic support. We will continue to work through all key areas and look at areas of reconstruction.

Again, I will write to the noble Lord, Lord Anderson, among others, on the specific details of the asset seizures which are being conducted. The UK Government are considering all options for seizing assets to support the people of Ukraine. I disagree profoundly with my noble friend Lord Balfe, who said that, somehow, this will result in other assets from other countries pulling out from the UK. I worked in the City of London for 20 years; it is a robust centre. The reason we have seized assets belonging to Russia is because Russia invaded a sovereign territory. If Russia pulls out now, the war can end, and we can look to see how assets can be used to rebuild. Russia should pull out now for the sake its own people within Russia. There is no opposition there; we have seen what happened to the likes of Mr Navalny.

Finally, I turn to the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, about the incredible role played by Rafael Rossi. I join the noble Lord in commending his role among probably the most trying circumstances in the IAEA nuclear facility.

To conclude, this is an illegal invasion which should never have happened. I agree with noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Tunncliffe, who said that it has gone on for far too long. I hear what he says about the need for structured working and assurances on what we will do next. However, I am sure that he would recognise that we are planning to support, and have already supported, the humanitarian, military, economic, justice and accountability pillars to ensure that Ukraine prevails.

Russia will not pull back. As I said earlier, Russia can end this war by ceasing its illegal assault on Ukraine today and withdrawing its forces. I am sure that I speak for every noble Lord who has spoken in this Chamber and beyond when I say that we salute the resilience, resolve and courage of the Ukrainian people. We saw that resolve and courage once again with the visit of the First Lady. We will stand firm; we will be relentless in our support for Ukraine's right to self-defence. Parties across your Lordships' House have backed this strong response, and I know that that is backed by the majority of those who sit on the Cross Benches. That unity of purpose and action will ultimately be our joint resolve and support of Ukraine. Our support for Ukraine matters; it matters for freedom, democracy and for every country that neighbours Russia. I have spoken to their Ministers; they may not come out due to fear, but many worry that, if Russia were allowed to prevail, they would be next.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

I end, if I may, on a very personal note, going back to a point made by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton of Richmond, about how far this narrative is reaching. Half way through this year, I was on one of my many calls to the incredible Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, who has become a good friend of mine. I was in my study at home. My young son, Faris Amaan—it means “knight of peace”; perhaps there is a poignancy in that—came in, wanting to give me a bit of a hug, because he had come from his friend’s house. He knew I was busy; he had picked up from the call that we were talking about the very atrocities that the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, talked about, which were being inflicted on mothers and young children. Young Faris heard that and disappeared; he returned once he knew the call was over, knocked on the door and gave me a hand-painted flag of Ukraine, with the words written on it: “For the children of Ukraine.” *Sláva Ukraini!*

6.05 pm

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): It remains only for me to thank noble Lords for the cumulative wisdom that has been passed on. I very much hope that a lot of the very valuable points being made around the House will be taken on board and passed on by the Minister. In particular, I thank him for giving his assurance, as far as he is able, that effective means of communication are in place. It was important for us and other people to hear that, because they might increasingly be needed as the crisis gets worse in the months ahead. More widely, the vast majority of us want to thank the Minister personally and, through him, the Government, for standing so firm by the side of Ukraine in recent months.

Of course, there have been three dissenting voices: the noble Lords, Lord Campbell-Savours, Lord Skidelsky and Lord Balfe. With due respect, I suggest to those three noble Lords that the rest of us are not quite as far away from the points that they made as they might think. First, I, personally, strongly agree with the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, that we should never have got into this place in the first place. Clearly, 30 or more years ago, something went very badly wrong indeed; there was a failure of policy and diplomacy, and we find ourselves once again in a binary relationship with Russia. It is nothing less than tragic that we find ourselves here, but the fact is that we are here; we have to deal with the situation where we are now, and the situation so clearly outlined by the Minister is that a

defenceless country has been illegally, immorally and outrageously invaded by Mr Putin’s policy. Whatever the faults are on our side—and they are manifest; there is no sense of self-righteousness in this struggle at all—there is no moral equivalence. We must be wary of making a moral equivalence between innocent Ukraine and an aggressive foreign power invading it.

The second point made by the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, was about the concessions that have to be made, which was picked up also by the noble Lord, Lord Balfe. I absolutely agree, as I am sure many others would. Many of those concessions, as the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, said, were already on the table and should perhaps already have been accepted—and they will certainly have to be accepted when negotiations come. As my noble friend Lord Skidelsky said, of course we have to push for negotiations, but it takes two to negotiate. It is no good simply wishing Mr Putin away. If he did go, we might get somebody even more extreme taking over, who thinks that Putin has not been hard enough in this war. But at the moment we are dealing with Putin, and he is going to stop only when he feels that there is nothing else to gain by pursuing this war.

As I made clear in my opening remarks, my own view is that, if the Ukrainian forces manage to advance as far as the borders of Crimea, Ukraine should certainly declare a unilateral ceasefire and wait for Mr Putin because of course, at that point, we will all be hearing the words screaming in the air: “Crisis, crisis, crisis”. However, until that point, there will be negotiations only when both sides feel that there is nothing more to achieve by warfare. Sadly, it will probably come at some point over these next few months if they both get bogged down with the winter continuing. Negotiations will have to come at some point, concessions will have to be made, and the war will come to an end.

Let us never forget the words of the Duke of Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo when he said that there is only one thing sadder than winning a war; that brings out well the tragic sense that, even if a war is won, it is part of the tragedy that we are in as human beings. There is a sad, tragic element to this. Meanwhile, within that mess that we have made as human beings, moral choices have to be made. The whole country is behind the Government at the moment in the policy they are pursuing.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 6.11 pm.

