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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Questions	
Ukraine: Post-conflict Reconstruction	551
Global Famine: Solutions.....	554
Commonwealth Games	558
Asylum Seekers: Channel Crossings	561
Armed Forces	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	564
Life Skills and Citizenship	
<i>Question for Short Debate</i>	609
EU Programmes	
<i>Statement</i>	624
Nuclear Energy	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	634
<hr/>	
Grand Committee	
Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointment Functions) Regulations 2023	
<i>Considered in Grand Committee</i>	GC 91
Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure (Security Requirements for Relevant Connectable Products) Regulations 2023	
<i>Considered in Grand Committee</i>	GC 94

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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 7 September 2023

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Exeter.

Ukraine: Post-conflict Reconstruction Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

To ask His Majesty's Government what provision they are making in budgetary contingencies for future years for a United Kingdom contribution to post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, the United Kingdom and international partners are resolute and united in supporting Ukraine to rebuild and emerge from the war with a modernised economy resilient to Russian threats. The Ukraine Recovery Conference in London raised over \$60 billion in international support, including multi-year commitments by the UK and others. We have allocated £395 million in bilateral assistance between 2023 and 2025, alongside up to \$5 billion in fiscal support. Support for the year 2025-26 onwards will, of course, be confirmed after the spending review.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): I hope that the Minister can confirm that the Treasury and the Foreign Office are very clear about the size and long-term nature of the commitment to rebuilding Ukraine. The Republicans in the US Congress, with whom many Conservatives are now very close, are saying that the United States does not really need to commit to supporting Ukraine. Many Conservatives who supported the leave campaign thought that we should not be paying into the European Union budget, much of which was going to the reconstruction and development of east European, formerly Soviet countries, which contributed to British security. To ensure that Conservatives in opposition do not attack whichever Government it is for raising public spending to support Ukraine long-term, can he reassure us that the Treasury has this publicly in the forward figures?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord knows that I respect him greatly, but I am surprised by both the tone and the substance of his question. This Government, together with the full support of His Majesty's Opposition, have been resolute—and, indeed, there has been support from the Liberal Democrats and universal support for the action that we have taken, for the support that we have given and, of course, for the financial commitments that we have made on humanitarian assistance, economic support, financial support and defence spending.

I have just had a meeting with our outgoing ambassador, Melinda Simmons, and I pay tribute, and I am sure that all noble Lords join me in paying tribute, to her resilience. As a sign of affection and

support between us and the Ukrainian people—it is perhaps a poignant and reflective moment, but an interesting one, which I think that we should recognise—on her departure, a beautiful gesture on their part was to name a specific pastry after Melinda and call it the Melinda pastry. That shows the strength of relationships that we have built.

I am proud and resolute in that support. The noble Lord talked about the US. There are many Republicans—and I am not there to comment on the Republicans and Democrats. One thing is clear, irrespective: we have seen strong support from across the United States. As the noble Lord knows, Secretary Blinken is currently in Ukraine. Our support is resolute, and this is across the piece, irrespective of change. From this country, from this House and from the other place, there is unity of purpose and unity of action—we stand with Ukraine.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): I take this opportunity to reiterate the Opposition's support for the Government and absolute commitment to that—and certainly a future Labour Government will continue that support for Ukraine. The noble Lord mentioned the conference; at that conference, Ursula von der Leyen said that €200 billion of frozen assets belonging to the central bank of Russia will be repurposed to fund Ukraine's reconstruction. Can the Minister update the House on what we are doing about those repurposed sanctioned and frozen assets? That is the key—making sure that Russia pays with its own money.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): First of all, I thank the noble Lord again for underlining the strong support of His Majesty's Opposition. I have been very clear on the international stage that we speak as one—and I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in that respect as well as to my noble friend Lady Goldie, who will respond to a debate on this issue shortly. On the issue of sanctions, I agree with the noble Lord, and we are supportive of those actions. More than 60% of Mr Putin's war chest has been immobilised—that is £275 billion-worth. The end intent, with all legal considerations taken account of, is that it should be repurposed and service in rebuilding the infrastructure that Russia has destroyed in Ukraine.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, is it not important to recognise that among the destruction have been many historic buildings? It is very important that the Ukrainians are able to do what the Poles did in Warsaw—although under a very unhappy Administration. Is it not crucial that we give as much technical advice as we can, through bodies such as English Heritage, so that they can rebuild their patrimony?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I take on board what my noble friend has said. I assure him that we are working to ensure that the infrastructure within Ukraine is developed in a more resilient fashion. We are providing technical support. We are working on energy infrastructure. My noble friend makes an important point about cultural heritage. We are working

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]
with bodies such as UNESCO to ensure that, first and foremost, we protect those heritage sites and that, where they have been destroyed, they are rebuilt.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, the Prime Minister confirmed in February that more than £2 billion of assets that previously belonged to Roman Abramovich of Chelsea Football Club were ready to be transferred to a humanitarian foundation to be spent on those impacted by the war in Ukraine. That money has not yet been transferred; the foundation has not yet been established; the humanitarian work has not yet begun. Will the Government move a bit more quickly to ensure that this happens as soon as possible?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): I can confirm that that was the point my right honourable friend made. The current situation remains that those assets are frozen and cannot be moved unless a licence is issued by the OFSI department within the Treasury. I can assure the noble Lord that we are working in an expedited way with our colleagues in the Treasury to ensure that those funds can be utilised appropriately.

Lord Bellingham (Con): My Lords, the Minister will be aware of yesterday's tragic news of the air raid on the Ukrainian city of Kostiantynivka, where 17 people were killed. Millions of pounds-worth of further damage was added to the literally hundreds of billions-worth of damage that has already been done. Surely we should be looking at a co-ordinated, Marshall-style plan for the rebuilding of Ukraine.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My noble friend raises another tragic event. I am sure that I speak for the whole House in saying that we stand once again in unity with the people of Ukraine. It was a blatant attack on a market in the middle of the day. We have heard about the 17 fatalities, and those are added to the many fatalities that have happened already and, tragically, I am sure that there will be others. I agree with my noble friend and I assure him that we are working exactly in that way, with cities being allocated to key countries—for example, there are elements within the city of Kyiv that are specific to UK infrastructure development. Of course, the real challenge is that, every time something is rebuilt, the Russians do not desist from destroying it again, so there has to be a plan. I assure my noble friend that we are working with international partners in that respect.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD): My Lords, can I ask the Minister to give some consideration to the scale of the problem? Does he recall that Europe got \$13 billion after President Truman signed the Economic Recovery Act in 1948? Who is going to be as generous as that when it comes to Ukraine?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): We are already seeing the support and generosity, not just of the United Kingdom and our partners in Europe and in the United States. We have been heartened in the advocacy that we have been doing, for example, across the Gulf states. We have seen the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provide £100 million in humanitarian support.

This trajectory will continue, and we are working towards the G20, which is the next important milestone. The UN General Assembly high-level week in New York will provide other opportunities to focus on a structured approach. But from what we have seen—and we should look at that as a precedent—everyone has come forward to provide the kind of technical and financial support that Ukraine needs.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, the Minister knows that I support the valuable assistance that has been provided to Ukraine. Can he give the House the assurance that, for any funds going forward, there will not, as happened with the previous funds, be a like-for-like matched cut in the official development assistance budget? We may win in Ukraine, but we will lose in the global South if the support we provide for Ukraine is cut from the emergency relief given to those countries most affected by this in Africa.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): The noble Lord will be aware that we are producing a White Paper on the whole issue of international development to ensure that we can align our priorities and provide the support that is needed by countries around the world. I am proud of the United Kingdom's historical record in supporting the most vulnerable communities; that will remain a priority. Equally, this is a very different situation that we face: this is a war in Europe, the like of which we have not seen since 1945. I believe, and I am sure the noble Lord agrees, that it is right that we support Ukraine at this important juncture.

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab): My Lords, looking further ahead, the restoration and growth of trade will be an important part of Ukraine's recovery. Have we looked to see whether we could build our trade in the longer term with Ukraine, and in which areas would we explore?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): I can assure the noble Lord that we are doing exactly that. We are already looking at supporting Ukraine with generators through the Energy Community support fund. We are also providing a financial guarantee for a £47.5 million loan from the EBRD, we are looking at £35 million of innovation investment in energy recovery, and we are providing loan guarantees to Ukraine in the medium to long term.

Global Famine: Solutions *Question*

11.16 am

Asked by Lord Collins of Highbury

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the five solutions to global famine proposed by the President of the International Rescue Committee to the United Nations Security Council High-Level Open Debate on Conflict-Induced Food Insecurity and Famine on 3 August.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, the United Kingdom is stepping up action to improve global food security and nutrition. We will

spend at least £1.5 billion on improving nutrition from 2022 to 2030. Our Permanent Representative to the UN, Dame Barbara Woodward, briefed the US-led open debate at the UN Security Council to strengthen global food systems, prevent future famines and reduce conflict. At the debate the International Rescue Committee suggested five helpful, practical solutions to insecurity and famine. The UK is taking concerted action to tackle hunger, including by protecting global food systems.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, the shocking statistic that David Miliband highlighted at that conference is that 80% of the world's acutely malnourished children are not getting any treatment at all. The lifelong consequences are horrendous. Solutions I have witnessed in Africa are the simple test of a band around the arm by parents and community health workers to judge whether a child is malnourished, and the supply of very cheap and cost-effective ready-to-use therapeutic food. In Mali this approach resulted in a 92% success rate and a 30% cost saving on other methods. Will this action be prioritised as part of the Minister's pledge of £1.5 billion? When will we know how this money will be spent between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Lord. I know he has been seized of this issue, including in his work with the all-party parliamentary group. I can give him an assurance about the practical nature of what he suggests. In his report, David Miliband talked about these actions being taken in Kenya and Malawi. They are sensible, low cost and efficient. As the noble Lord said, they identify malnutrition at an early stage. That early intervention is crucial, particularly in helping impoverished children. We are committed to it. Our funding underlines our strong support in this area. As I said in answer to the previous Question, we do a lot on the world stage, where we are very much aligned in helping the most vulnerable. Among those are malnourished children. We need to be focused on those children to ensure that this remains a legacy of which we can be proud in the years to come.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, this is my first opportunity to welcome the proscription of the Wagner Group. The president of the IRC specifically singled out the Sahel and Sudan as part of this crisis of famine, so I welcome the Government's moves this week, since I was the first person in Parliament to call for its proscription last spring.

I hope the Minister will reflect on the fact that the UK Government have cut support for famine relief in the Horn of Africa in particular—this conflict-afflicted region. This led the Catholic humanitarian charity CAFOD to say in a statement on 31 May this year:

“This is a shameful betrayal of the people suffering and, despite their claims, shows the government is not taking this crisis seriously”.

Now that both Labour and the Conservatives are not going to immediately restore the 0.7% lawful target after the next general election, when does the Minister forecast that the UK will return to the level of support for famine relief that we had before the cuts?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as I look around this Chamber, I am sure we are all very much at one on the noble Lord's earlier point about the Wagner Group. Proscribing a group, as I have always said from this Dispatch Box, is a sensitive issue that needs to be measured. I pay tribute to our colleagues in the Home Office who took that considered approach to ensure that all legal avenues were covered. I am pleased that has now taken place. The group caused instability in the very regions the noble Lord mentioned. We are making assessments to see whether that makes a difference. Personally, I do not think it will make that much difference in terms of its structures: I am sure it will have some kind of contingency in place.

On the wider point, of course there has been a limit to what we have been able to spend with the reduction from 0.7% to 0.5%. We are committed to restoring that at the earliest opportunity when the fiscal situation allows, but at the same time we recognise that the United Kingdom has continued to support many communities across the Sahel, further afield in Africa and indeed in Asia, on some of the key priorities that we remain very much aligned with.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): The Minister used the phrase,

“at the earliest opportunity when the fiscal situation allows”.

Would he care to elaborate on exactly what that means?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): “Earliest” means at the earliest time possible, and “fiscal situation” means when our finances allow us to. I think the noble Lord knows that already.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): The Minister is so experienced and has been in the job a long time. He must know better than anyone in this House when that is likely to be. Can he tell us?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): This is when you look upwards for divine inspiration, notwithstanding being a person of faith. In all seriousness, it is important that a decision was taken that was not an easy one but a challenging one. The fact is that, even with our 0.5%, we have continued to support many communities around the world. As I said, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that we will look to return to 0.7% at the earliest opportunity. We are going through very challenging times, both domestically and internationally, and I am proud of the fact that we have continued to stand by many of our international obligations, especially when it comes to helping the most vulnerable around the world.

The Lord Bishop of Exeter: My Lords, as the president of the International Rescue Committee rightly noted, conflict is one of the primary drivers of food insecurity around the globe, so what steps are His Majesty's Government taking, in co-operation with our partners, to convene dialogue and work with local peacebuilders and faith leaders to help in areas of conflict?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): We are working in many areas, including an area in which I lead on the initiative of preventing sexual violence in conflict.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

Famine is a key driver of conflict; we all recognise that. That is why I said in my original Answer that our Permanent Representative in New York briefed the Security Council, which is purposed to look at conflict alleviation and to prevent conflict in the first place. We are working with faith leaders and civil society organisations in key areas and key countries on the ground. In Yemen, for example, near neighbours include the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We are engaging in places such as Afghanistan, where faith leaders have an important role. Some of this is discreet and we cannot go into the detail, to protect and support those who are working on the ground, but I assure the right reverend Prelate that we are doing exactly that.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, one of the things David Miliband also mentioned, on conflict being the driver, is that there is so much impunity and that the world needs to act when people commit horrendous crimes against humanity. We should stop just using words and take action. Does he agree with David Miliband's statement in that regard?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, it is not just David Miliband who says that; we all agree that there must be accountability and justice for those who suffer and for survivors of whatever violence takes place. That is why I am proud, as I said on the earlier Question about Ukraine, that among the many areas that the United Kingdom is now supporting, we are supporting Ukraine on exactly that—during the conflict, on justice and accountability. As the noble Lord knows, we are working with key organisations, including the International Criminal Court, to ensure that those who commit these terrible, abhorrent crimes are brought to justice at the earliest point possible.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, the Russians having broken the agreement about grain shipments, which will obviously have a major impact, has the international community given any consideration to measures that can be taken to help resolve the problem caused by that lack of grain now shipping out of Ukraine?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I have two points to make. First, on the broader point on issues of food insecurity, we in your Lordships' House and in the other place all need to ensure that that narrative is established. Russia says erroneously that it is sanctions that are causing the humanitarian crisis. As all noble Lords know, every sanction that has been applied has a humanitarian carve-out. The grain initiative was an innovative initiative sponsored by the UN, where Turkey played an important role, and with the likes of Turkey we are ensuring that we can restore this initiative because it provides support to many. Let us put this into a context that needs to be understood: 400 million people across the world used to get their grain from Ukraine, which is why this initiative is so important.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, Russia has attacked grain stores along the Danube. Will my noble friend make sure that we carefully record this crime against humanity when it comes to the reckoning?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as ever my noble friend is absolutely right, and I agree with him. I assure him that we are doing exactly that with key partners. The challenge has also been, when we look at the Danube, that some attacks are on territory currently controlled by Russia. A full assessment is being made on certain parts of the infrastructure, not just the grain. As he knows, various elements have caused environmental pollution; pollutants have gone into the Danube and are feeding into the Black Sea as well. There will be a real environmental challenge to face, post the war, but I assure him that we are working with key partners to ensure that this can be addressed. Importantly, those who have influence over Russia should provide access so that assessments can be made.

Commonwealth Games

Question

11.27 am

Asked by **Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent decisions by the governments of (1) Victoria, Australia, and (2) Alberta, Canada, to withdraw from bids to host the Commonwealth Games in 2026 and 2030.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay) (Con): My Lords, His Majesty's Government recognise the great value of major sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, particularly with the United Kingdom having hosted the Games twice in the past decade. Last year's Games in Birmingham demonstrated the power of sport in bringing people together and building a foundation for a wide-ranging legacy that will deliver benefits for many years to come. We therefore urge the Commonwealth Games Federation to work towards a sustainable resolution for 2026 and 2030.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): I thank the Government very much for their urgency in trying to ensure that we find a solution: I hope that we see that in the weeks and months to come. The Commonwealth Games are a fabulous exhibition of the benefit of the Commonwealth and the coming together of many nations from right across the globe. They are one of the most popular and successful multisport international events that we see. In both Birmingham and Glasgow in the past decade, we have seen not just the sporting benefits but the economic benefits of the Games to the cities and the wider regions. So, will the Government work with the national teams of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland to make sure that they rule out no options in order to deal with this immediate emergency of the Games not having a host for 2026? Will they also work with other Governments in the Commonwealth and with the Commonwealth Games Federation to make sure that, in the long term, the Commonwealth Games are able to be hosted by countries that are not the large, richer, white countries of the Commonwealth but are other countries in the Commonwealth, so that "commonwealth" goes back into the Commonwealth Games?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): Yes, we absolutely agree with the noble Lord. It is important that the Games remain a truly global Games. He is right to point to the economic benefits as well as the many other benefits that hosting the Games can accrue; he will know this very well, of course, from his own involvement with the successful Glasgow Games in 2014. Our interim assessment of the Games in Birmingham last year shows that they added £870 million of GVA to the UK economy, more than half of that going to the West Midlands, and we look forward to the fuller economic analysis coming soon. My right honourable friend the Sports Minister has met the Commonwealth Games Federation to talk about the urgency with which it is looking at this issue and we are keen for it to find a resolution.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, is quite right. Will the Government work very closely with Marlborough House and the secretariat to ensure that there is momentum behind recovery, and we do not let the Games just die? Will his colleagues bear in mind that the Commonwealth network is in many ways our own gateway to the great markets of Asia and Africa, as well as a bulwark against Chinese domination in the developing world? We need them just as much as they need us.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): My noble friend, who is a strong supporter of the Commonwealth, makes a very valuable point about the Games' geopolitical importance as well the great fun they involve for everyone taking part and the legacy they can bring in terms of sports participation and economic benefit. We are speaking to the Commonwealth Games Federation, which makes the decision here, but it is an issue we will of course raise with the Commonwealth at every appropriate level.

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as chair of Sport Wales and I also competed at three Commonwealth Games at the beginning, middle and end of my career. We should not forget that the Manchester inclusive Games played a big part in us winning 2012. What assessment has been made of the impact on disability sport of potentially losing the Games, as they do have a significant role to play in developing talented British athletes?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): Your Lordships' House benefits from sports people who have competed at every level, and I am glad that the noble Baroness has made her point. We hope that we do not lose the Games; we are working with the Commonwealth Games Federation to ensure that the Games go ahead and there is a sustainable resolution for both 2026 and 2030. She is right to point to their importance in the sporting pipeline for people of all abilities, and that is why we would like to see them continue.

Lord Razzall (LD): My Lords, I accept that this is not the direct responsibility of the Government, except Chancellor as a leading member of the Commonwealth. Does the Minister believe that this disaster may be the responsibility of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which has not handled it terribly well, or does he believe that the Games have become a financial extravaganza, way

beyond the days when my noble friend Lord Campbell participated? May I cheekily ask whether he believes it would help if the Commonwealth Games followed the recent proposal of the Olympic Committee to add cricket to the roster of games played?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): The Governments of Alberta and Victoria have cited cost as a reason for their decision. That is curious in the light of Birmingham's experience, where the Games came in £70 million under budget and the Government gave that money to the West Midlands Combined Authority to spend on a variety of important initiatives, including cultural and sporting ones, in that part of the UK. So it is possible to deliver a Games that everyone can enjoy, as they did in Birmingham, on time and on budget, and we are very happy to share the lessons of Birmingham's successful hosting with those who might want to bid. My right honourable friend the Sports Minister has been speaking to the federation about learning those lessons.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): My Lords, this has happened a few times before. Can the Minister ensure that His Majesty's Government do more to facilitate discussions on the future direction of the competition? Does it need to be reinvented somehow or does more thought need to be given to reducing the costs to hosts? Would it perhaps be more sustainable if the frequency of the Games was varied to match economic needs? Thinking about my own city, which has finally entered the Europa League this year, there are clear economic benefits demonstrated from hosting events like that. Are the Government doing enough to promote participation in wider international sporting competitions so that we can reap the benefit of the economic boost they bring to our country?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): Yes, we fully recognise the important economic boost that hosting major sporting events can bring. Sport is estimated to be worth over £38 billion a year to our economy. The hosting of the women's Euros in 2022 generated economic activity of £81 million across the eight host cities that welcomed visitors and supported 1,200 full-time equivalent jobs. It also saw a 140% increase in participation among girls in the season after the tournament—so the benefits are manifold. The Commonwealth Games Federation is exploring all options to secure the long-term viability of the Commonwealth Games. It has committed to putting a firmer plan in place by the time of its general assembly in November.

Lord Moynihan (Con): My Lords, my noble friend the Minister will know that the highly successful 1908 summer Olympics in London was a multisport event that ran for seven months, with many sports being organised sequentially. Given how expensive it is to run the Commonwealth Games and how few countries can afford to do so, would the Government consider supporting a Commonwealth Games where different Commonwealth countries were invited to host different sporting events in the same year? It would make the Games a great festival of Commonwealth sport that would be more affordable and would allow more sports and more countries to be added to the Games' agenda.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): I missed the Games that my noble friend mentioned at the outset of his question, but his suggestion is a good one. The Commonwealth Games Federation is looking at all options. It is important that the Games remain a truly global event and I will pass on his very sensible suggestion to my right honourable friend the Sports Minister.

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, the Minister mentioned the increase in sports participation that followed the Commonwealth Games. Typically, there is also a rise in volunteering, and we know from 2012 that sadly this was not sustained after the Games. What lessons were learned from that, and did we see a rise in volunteering around the Birmingham Commonwealth Games that we will see sustained?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): Our full impact assessment of the Birmingham Games will follow early in the new year, so I will draw out the points the noble Baroness rightly raises. The legacy of hosting these major events is manifold. There was a brilliant cultural programme that sat alongside the Birmingham Games and was enjoyed by millions of people around the world watching on television, as well as those who visited in person. That is exactly why we are so proud to host such large events.

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con): My Lords, would my noble friend agree that it is entirely possible to have an economic model that works for Commonwealth Games, as has been seen in Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester? Would he like to remind the House that when good Games become great Games there is an economic, educational, environmental, social, sporting and infrastructure legacy for decades to come?

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): I wholeheartedly agree with my noble friend and would remind your Lordships' House that the Birmingham Games came in £70 million under budget. They brought great joy to everyone who watched them and participated, and they were done with great economic success.

Asylum Seekers: Channel Crossings

Question

11.37 am

Asked by **Lord Dubs**

To ask His Majesty's Government how many people arrived as asylum seekers in the United Kingdom after crossing the channel by small boat during the year to date and what was the comparable figure for 2022.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Borders (Lord Murray of Blidworth) (Con): My Lords, our published data shows that, so far, a total of 7,349 people made asylum claims in the United Kingdom from 1 January to 30 June 2023, having made a dangerous, illegal and unnecessary crossing of the channel by small boat. The figure for the same period in 2022 is 12,374. This represents a decline of 41%.

Lord Dubs (Lab): I think the Minister would concede that the weather has played a large part in the movement of numbers, and in most recent days the numbers have been pretty high. Is it not the case that, of those arriving in small boats in the last year, only 1% have had their asylum claim actually decided, and that the number of people forcibly returned who failed the asylum test has gone down very much compared to recent years? What do a Government do when their policies manifestly fail? They blame the lawyers, as the Immigration Minister did a couple of days ago when he threatened lawyers with life imprisonment if they gave advice to asylum seekers. We have surely sunk to a low level when it has come to that.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): On the three points the noble Lord raises, first, I do not accept that the decline is entirely down to the weather. One will have seen that, even in the comparator week of 2022 to this week of September, small boat arrivals are very significantly down, by a sum in the region of 20%. As to his second point, on returns, there is very good news to tell. So efficient now are our returns of Albanians that the number of Albanians crossing the channel has reduced in excess of 90%. As to his final point, on lawyers, abusing our asylum process by providing accounts to individuals to falsely claim asylum is a problem. Noble Lords will have seen the reporting in relation to that. Any responsible Government would agree that this is a dreadful crime which prioritises those who have no claim over those who would have a good claim. This Government take very seriously their obligations towards stopping that kind of abuse by those few practitioners who behave in this fashion. That is why we have set up the enablers task force, which will bring together all the information, allowing for the prosecutions of these people.

Lord German (LD): My Lords, we are told by the Government that 46% of asylum seekers reach here by small boat. Can the Minister tell us how the other 54% arrive?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): They arrive usually on visas, such as student or work visas, or they overstay on other types of visas.

Lord Winston (Lab): The Minister used the phrase that their journey was "dangerous, illegal and unnecessary". I wonder if he would be kind enough to consider retracting the word "unnecessary", because it suggests some prejudice as to what we do not know about why people are coming in these waters under such danger, and under great hardship.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): The journeys are unnecessary, and I stand by that. If they are leaving from France or Belgium, they are in a safe country—a signatory of the refugee convention. They can make their refugee asylum claims in those countries. The journey across the channel is dangerous and illegal and they should not do it; it is unnecessary.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, last month's High Court judgment said that the Home Office's national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children was failing. The judge said that neither

the Home Office, nor Kent County Council, knew where many—possibly hundreds—of the children were, let alone if they were safe, as required under the Children Act 1989. Will the Minister agree to return to the House to explain what it is now doing in the light of that judgment?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): The House will recall that yesterday evening and yesterday morning we canvassed these topics previously. I can reassure the noble Baroness that the House is considering the judgment of Mr Justice Chamberlain in that case, and steps are being taken to ensure that the national transfer scheme operates efficiently. As the noble Baroness will appreciate, once the Illegal Migration Act 2023 is in force, the numbers crossing the channel will be lower and the numbers of UASC entering through the channel route will be reduced. Therefore, the problem should ameliorate.

Lord Blunkett (Lab): My Lords, the Minister rightly drew attention to the agreement to return Albanians to their home country. The Government themselves claim that 30% of previous arrivals were from Albania. If we take those Albanian returns out, the statistics that have been enunciated this morning are very different from the ones that the Minister was seeking to present, given that the latest stats I have are that, last year, only 10% of those arriving were processed but of those some 86% were granted asylum. That puts a very different picture on the rhetoric that is coming from the Government at the moment.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): As I say, the history of effecting returns has been difficult hitherto, as it was under the previous Labour Administration. However, I am glad to say that returns are now being effected very successfully to those countries with which we have an agreement, such as Albania, as identified by the noble Lord. Further work will be done in relation to that. Of course, once we have the outcome of the Supreme Court litigation, and the avenue of removal to a safe third country is available, one would anticipate that the number of removals will increase.

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, could my noble friend the Minister please elaborate on when he expects the Illegal Migration Act to be in force, because it makes lawful the Home Office accommodation of children who obviously are not going to be returned under that Act? Could he outline to noble Lords whether there will be statistics about where children actually end up once the Act is in force? Will we know whether they are in hotels, or whether they are under the care of the local authority?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I have no doubt that the Home Office will provide statistics, as it does at the moment, on a regular basis. As to the indication of when the provisions of the Illegal Migration Act in relation to transfer come into force, that depends on a number of variables, not least the position in relation to the litigation. However, I am sure that I will be able to revert to the House in due course with news on that.

Lord Cormack (Con): Could my noble friend expand on the answer that he gave the noble Lord, Lord German, about the 54%? A number of us were slightly baffled by what he said—could he expand on that?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): Of asylum claims made in the 12-month period ending June 2023, 46% were made by those who were entering illegally via a small boat. The remainder were made up of other types of illegal entry—for example, in a lorry, or those who have come to Britain by a lawful route with their tourist, work or study visa and then claimed asylum when they were here, or overstayed a visa when they were here legally. I hope that explains to my noble friend how that figure was arrived at.

Lord Coaker (Lab): My Lords, further to previous questions from my noble friend Lord Blunkett and the noble Lord, Lord Howard, the Minister has spoken of doing more to disrupt the actual supply of small boats, which are often flimsy and extremely dangerous. The Minister facilitated a visit for me to see this first hand, which I was very grateful for. Last night, he said that the Home Office is speaking with the French about what to do about this, because it is a real problem. On a practical level, why is it that we cannot do more to disrupt the supply of these small boats, which are not manufactured in France? Can the Minister update the House on what is happening with that?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I agree with much of what the noble Lord says. Clearly, disruption upstream of the criminal gangs is really important. Minister Jenrick visited Turkey in the last few weeks and the Turks have agreed, with the UK Government, to facilitate work to disrupt the criminal gangs. I understand that a lot of the boats are made in Turkey and a lot of the parts come through there, so that will be a vital part of the battle against the gangs. My right honourable friend the Minister for Security visited Iraq with the same objective. This is an important part of the strategy in fighting the upstream element of the gangs. Working with the French is something that is ongoing, and is one of the benefits of the agreement that the Prime Minister made earlier in the year. I am very grateful for the question.

Armed Forces

Motion to Take Note

11.48 am

Moved by Lord Soames of Fletching

That this House takes note of the role of the Armed Forces and the United Kingdom's defence policy.

Lord Soames of Fletching (Con): My Lords, I am very honoured to be entrusted to introduce this debate on our Armed Forces and the United Kingdom's defence policy, at a time when we and our allies find ourselves in a very grave, unstable and uncertain period. I declare my interest as honorary colonel of C Squadron, The Royal Yeomanry—the Kent and Sharpshooters Yeomanry. Members of the regiment are currently deployed on operations in support of the Royal Lancers, in our commitment to NATO's enhanced forward

[LORD SOAMES OF FLETCHING]

presence in Poland, and in support of the Household Cavalry on Operation TOSCA in Cyprus. It is worthy of note that, over the past three years, the Royal Yeomanry has deployed in excess of 150 Army Reserve soldiers in support of operations and other defence tasks overseas—it is a fine record indeed.

We have witnessed the unfolding reality and cost, in both men and materiel, of the high-intensity land battle in Ukraine. That has brought home to the United Kingdom that our country needs to pay far greater attention to defence and resilience, both civilian and military—and, especially importantly, to maintaining and sustaining our capabilities. But the sad truth, as we all know, is that, given the threats and circumstances, we are not spending enough money on defence. We now have very small Armed Forces and, unless we invest at scale and capacity, we risk being left behind by the United States and other allies and, frankly, no longer able to play the kind of role that we should in the world.

We are all only too well aware of the grave dangers ahead. The war in Ukraine is certainly not the only challenge we face: there are the global ambitions of China, including as a military power, and there continues to be instability in the Middle East and serious instability in Africa. We have important interests to protect and defend. At the same time, as I am sure my noble friend Lady Helic will tell this House, we need to pay far greater attention to shoring up other areas, such as the Balkans, where Russia exhibits every day its malign intent and where, frankly, we have not acted perhaps as quickly and robustly as we should.

All these disparate risks should command our concentration with the same clarity, focus and decisiveness that we devote to Ukraine. These issues are of the first importance to our Armed Forces, our intelligence services and our Diplomatic Service, and they daily grow more serious and complex. It is an important lesson for us to hoist aboard that we cannot complain from the sidelines about the erosion of the international rules-based order if we are not willing to play a large role in defending it. Indeed, it is a great irony that, as the West becomes more risk averse, so the world becomes more unstable before our eyes.

One of the most admirable things about this House is the extraordinary depth of expertise in defence, intelligence, diplomacy and all the other vital aspects of statecraft. There are speakers following me today who have far greater knowledge and far more important things to say than I, about strategy, technology, equipment, capacity and, above all, sustainability. After all, Ukraine has crystallised what machinery, technology and munitions for war in the 21st century look like; there is no sanctuary on the modern battlefield.

For my own part, I will say a few words about the service men and women. First, I pay a warm tribute to the service families, for whom life is not always easy and whose accommodation is sometimes inadequate, but who keep the home fires burning. We should be very grateful to them. The extraordinary range of roles in the Armed Forces should remind us that none of this would be possible without the consistent and unfailing support of Armed Forces families. Across

the world, whether training or on operations, our service men and women, including our Reserve Forces, often operate in hostile environments and endure real hardships and, sometimes, considerable danger. They operate and train in all sorts of environments and extremes across the world against every conceivable threat, and their success is testimony to their hard work, dedication, tenacity and resourcefulness. They are an immense credit to this country.

I also pay a very warm tribute—as I am sure the House will want to—following his departure, to our friend the Secretary of State for Defence, Ben Wallace, who did a wholly exceptional job, not least in making the Government realise that expenditure on defence is not discretionary. I also pay a very warm tribute to his excellent colleagues James Heapey, the Member for Wells, who is an outstanding Minister for the Armed Forces, and my noble friend Lady Goldie, who commands, for very good reason, such profound respect in this House. Ben Wallace's support for Ukraine has been nothing short of admirable—an approach which I hope will continue.

Service men and women see only bad news in the papers. Inevitably, the press tends to concentrate, understandably and not without good reason, on some of the catastrophic procurement disasters and other things that go wrong—they are inevitable on such a big scale and in a very big department. But what they and the world do not see is the consistently high standard of the service men and women, who, through realistic and robust training, prepare themselves for war. For the soldiers, sailors and airmen of today and tomorrow, as for their forebears, warfare will continue to represent the ultimate physical and moral challenge. They will encounter extreme danger in rapidly changing circumstances, amid conditions of chaos and uncertainty. Their skills and the quality of their leadership, weapons and equipment will be severely tested. Such operations are sustainable only by highly trained men and women motivated by the ethos of their services, by pride and loyalty to their traditions and institutions, by their unfailing and almost magical comradeship and a remarkable level of team spirit, and by the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities which lead people to put their lives on the line. That, at the end of the day, is what defence and debates on defence are all about. I remind this House of what Lord Wavell said in his famous lecture on generalship:

“in the last resort, the end of all military training, the settling of all policy, the ordering of all weaponry and all that goes into the makings of the armed forces is that the deciding factor in battle will always be this. That sooner or later, Private so-and-so will, of his own free will and in the face of great danger, uncertainty and chaos, have to advance to his front in the face of the enemy. If all that goes wrong, after all the training, the intensive preparation and the provision of equipment and expenditure, the system has failed”.

To that end, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, who I know take defence seriously, have a profound obligation to ensure that our Armed Forces are properly resourced for the hugely demanding and increasing tasks that are laid on them. With great respect, they should realise with humility how extraordinarily lucky we are to have such exceptional Armed Forces, and that none of this happens by magic and cannot just be regenerated on the spot at a whim. At every level of

command in all three services and throughout all ranks, they are truly formidable in their standards, both personally and professionally, in their teamwork and in their highly developed sense of cohesion, duty and obligation. They are an institution that is a priceless asset for this great country in the pursuit of our aims and interests, both at home and abroad.

It is an enormous credit to the quality of the leadership of the services that, in a period of unprecedented upheaval, they have managed to retain exceptional flexibility, combined with great clarity of purpose and endeavour. They deserve our whole-hearted support in every way that we can give it. I beg to move.

Noon

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for moving this debate. The world is more dangerous and unpredictable than at any time in my 58 years on the active list—a major war is actually taking place in Europe—and yet defence is not often discussed in this Chamber. I hope that will change. I must also make it clear—notwithstanding what I may say about defence shortfalls, and before the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, accuses me of being disloyal to the service I love—that our men and women in the Armed Forces are the best in the world, our Armed Forces are able to conduct almost the whole gamut of military operations and some of our equipment is the best in the world.

But, notwithstanding the siren voices of the Front Bench declaring otherwise, the defence budget is too small. In his resignation letter, Ben Wallace—who, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Soames, should be congratulated on his service to the United Kingdom and global security—stated that the Government have viewed the defence budget as “discretionary spend” and made savings “by hollowing out”. Indeed, he has made constant reference to his concerns over the hollowing out of the Armed Forces and I could list numerous examples today that affect our fighting capability because of that. In his letter, Wallace added:

“I genuinely believe that over the next decade the world will get more insecure and more unstable ... now is the time to invest”.

The vast majority of military experts, many of whom are in this House, would agree and consider that defence expenditure should rise significantly, as it has in numerous other countries. The Prime Minister’s letter in response to Wallace’s letter is not that reassuring, talking of defence funding being “on a stable footing” and expressing an aspiration—not a commitment—to reach 2.5% of GDP on defence spending. I believe we urgently need an increase of about £8 million in the defence budget and an immediate commitment to the defence budget being 3% of GDP.

The cry from the Treasury and others will be that there are huge inefficiencies in MoD spending and that by resolving these no extra funding will be required. While it would be foolish to deny that there is scope for efficiency savings—because there is—this will not cover the problem. Yes, we need to speed up and rationalise our procurement system—let us face it, there have been some terrible disasters, Ajax being one currently on the go—and an agreed defence industrial strategy and focus on timely delivery of systems with realistic penalties if not met would help, but defence

has suffered from continual so-called efficiency measures for years that in reality are cuts that have reduced military capability. For example, measures taken by the coalition in 2010 reduced our nation’s military capability by one-third and I do not believe that the nation realised that that was done.

Strong armed forces are a crucial deterrent and therefore prevent war. They also have utility in a number of other ways, particularly in terms of national resilience. But in the final analysis they are there to fight and win against the King’s enemies who wish to do our people and our nation harm. That is their prime aim and what they are there for. It seems that recently important social issues have distracted the senior decision-makers in the MoD, who should not forget that a single, unambiguous aim is the keystone of successful military operations and the master principle of war.

The MoD’s other affliction is what I call millennial business speak. What do noble Lords think of the following from the recently produced *Maritime Operating Concept*?

“Alongside the RN Strategy, it describes the Wise Pivot of the Maritime Force, from a platform-based, role-specific, and aggregated Fleet, to a distributed protean force, operating as a system of systems”.

Lord Nelson gave the following guidance:

“But, in case Signals can neither be seen or perfectly understood, no Captain can do very wrong if he places his Ship alongside that of an Enemy”.

It may lack nuance but is a little easier to understand.

I am sure other Members of the House, with their great knowledge, will identify many areas where hollowing out is affecting our capability. I did not intend doing that and noble Lords will be amazed that I have not mentioned ships—sorry, I just have. My message is that with all the other pressures on resources—and I realise they are huge—we can no longer avoid the hard decision that significantly more needs to be spent on defence if we are to ensure the security and wealth of our nation. After all, it is the prime responsibility of any Government.

12.05 pm

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, it is difficult to assess what size and structure of Armed Forces Britain needs without a coherent understanding of Britain’s place in a very rapidly changing world. The last Prime Minister but one was an enthusiast for turning away from commitment to the European region, with a tilt to the Indo-Pacific, for which we would need a larger Navy, and expeditionary forces able to operate at long range from the UK. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought attention back to European security and two changes of Prime Minister have lessened the underlying antagonism to co-operation with our neighbours, but no strategic foreign policy has emerged from recent Foreign Secretaries or Prime Ministers.

For as many years as I can remember, British foreign policy has been based on the foundation of British-American partnership, with the effectiveness of our defence forces judged by how seriously the Pentagon takes our contribution. We have to face the real prospect now that our partnership with the USA may be withering.

[LORD WALLACE OF SALTAIRE]

The next presidential election could bring back Donald Trump, or see a Democratic President hamstrung by a Republican Congress sceptical of supporting Ukraine and content for European states, including the UK, to defend themselves, as we hear presidential candidates saying.

It has to be a foundational principle of British defence policy, therefore, to share in maintaining the security of our own region, extending as far as the Mediterranean, north Africa, the Baltic, the Arctic and the Black Sea. In practice, our forces have co-operated closely with the French, Dutch, Belgians, Norwegians and others for many years. A Conservative Secretary of State once said to me: "I don't mind our doing that, so long as we don't have to tell anyone". I think he meant his own Back-Benchers and the right-wing press. It is high time that we made the best of working with our neighbours and recognised that in a context in which we can hardly afford to maintain the pretence of a full-range defence capability, our security is best protected by sharing tasks, training and equipment.

Part of the long-term problem of UK defence procurement has been that the effort to match the Americans in high-end war capability has led to rising costs, changing specifications and overcomplex weapons systems produced in small numbers and unattractive to export markets. One of the lessons of the conflict in Ukraine is that a larger number of lower-capability weapons may be worth more than a handful of sophisticated systems so expensive that commanders hesitate before committing them to action. The more sophisticated the systems are, the more likely that they will break down. Our Navy now consists mainly of a small number of highly sophisticated ships, many of which seem to break down frequently. Ukraine is teaching us that rapid adaptation of far cheaper and simpler civilian systems can make a real difference, and that larger numbers of units count in both attack and defence.

Another lesson of the Ukraine conflict is that you do not have to train military forces for long periods in order for them to be effective, particularly when commanders can draw on skills already acquired in civilian life. For centuries, British forces have been based on the assumption that we need long-term professional engagement for expeditionary service abroad, and that reserves are of doubtful use and unlikely to be ready in time for any unexpected crisis. As the size of our Armed Forces continues to shrink, there is a powerful case for a substantial increase in reserves.

The noble Lord, Lord Soames, mentioned the yeomanry. I am conscious of the contribution that forces from the London Scottish, now a reserve company of the Scots Guards, have made in recent years. They are valuable—they can make an enormous contribution. Ministers should now be emphasising the positive role that well-trained reserves play in strengthening the UK's security and expanding the reserves.

The need for home-based reserve forces becomes even clearer when we take into account the importance of improving the UK's resilience in the face of a changing pattern of threats. We have far fewer organised groups to assist with civil contingencies than many of

our neighbours, let alone the USA. Assistance to the civil power used to be a significant part of the responsibilities of our forces, but they are now too small to fulfil that role.

However, as the noble Lord, Lord West, said, little can be achieved without more money. So long as the overall priority of the Government and of the Conservative Party behind them is to cut taxes, and therefore to hold down public spending across the board, little can be done to improve our security and resilience. If the choice is between an early tax cut or an improvement in our national security, which will the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party choose?

12.11 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for securing this debate. It is very timely, as I worry that the capabilities of our Armed Forces are getting seriously out of balance with the ambitions of our defence policy.

Why do I say that? I suppose that one of the many benefits of being a Member of this House is that you get a free copy of the *New Statesman* every week. The copy I received just before the House went into Summer Recess contained an article by George Eaton on the fears of British decline. A quick summary of that article is that Britain is in relative decline, and that the decline is not historic or terminal. Importantly, however, the point the article makes is that we will not reverse or reverse that decline through the alchemy of a small number of transformative breakthroughs. The idea that we can quickly become a science superpower, a global leader in green tech or the world's entrepreneurial powerhouse are simply not feasible if you represent only 2% of global manufacture and global research and development.

The article made a simple footballing analogy: if you are sitting towards the lower end of the Premier League, you cannot suddenly reach the top by investing in one or two expensive players. Rather, you need to embark on a strategy of overall improvement. On reading the article, I reflected on the state of the UK's Armed Forces and this forthcoming debate.

I start with the reassurance that our Armed Forces are definitely still in the premiership. However, we are also in the 2% club, we are in relative decline, we definitely suffer from a belief in the magic of various alchemistries—digital, technological, doctrinal—and we have increasingly adopted a strategy of investment in a few very big players that we struggle to afford.

To add some flesh to this, our world-leading attributes probably consist of the continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent, the carrier-strike capability, our special forces, the overall quality of our people—as has been mentioned—and our ability to stage state ceremonial that is still the envy of the world. I worry that such capabilities are born more of a continuing desire to parade the totemic instruments of global authority rather than being the product of a cold-hearted analysis of defence need based on current threats and resource realities. I also fear that the excellence of such capabilities generates to an extent a misplaced public confidence in the Armed Forces as a whole.

To return to footballing parallels, the team has some wonderful players, we retain the ability to win some memorable games, but we do not have a big enough squad, we have some lousy kit and some very poor facilities, and we have no meaningful reserves, either human or material. We are not designed for resilience or deterrence.

What should we do? I fear that the Defence Command Paper was, perhaps understandably, an exercise if not in deception then at least in public and self-delusion. It seemed designed primarily to ingeniously reassure rather than honestly inform. What is needed is more blunt honesty about the need to resource defence appropriately and to apply those resources to a programme of holistic betterment, but, most of all, to set a realistic ambition for our nation.

As far as resources are concerned, I do not believe that the Government have developed a compelling strategic narrative to convince our society of the need to spend more on defence. Perhaps I worry in part because they do not themselves believe in such a narrative; hence, they are happy to publish illusions. As far as betterment is concerned, we need an holistic programme of reform that covers defence procurement, the relationship with the defence industrial base, the Reserve Forces, war-fighting resilience and the condition of defence infrastructure, including married quarters.

However, above all is the need to set a more realistic national ambition. At least part of the reason why Russia invaded Ukraine was that Putin did not think that NATO, and by inference the UK, had the capability or resolve to do anything about it. To an extent, he may have been proved wrong. However, the fact that Putin made that assumption means that our conventional deterrence posture lacked credibility.

I fear that we have forgotten the reality that defence is built largely on a paradigm. The greater the investment made in capability, the less likely it is that you will need to use it. Deterring war is a far less expensive option than fighting it, even by proxy. Therefore, the stark choice we face is either to increase resources or to reduce ambition. I fear that the alternative is incoherence and accelerating decline.

12.16 pm

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Con): My Lords, I start by reminding your Lordships' House of my various interests in the Armed Forces and thanking the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for introducing this excellent debate. I sense already that a common theme is building.

I have spent the first part of this week in Poland at its defence trade fair in my capacity as the Government's Defence Export Advocate. It was impossible not to feel a real sense of urgency in Poland's desire to modernise its Armed Forces as a result of the events in Ukraine. Impressively, Poland is set to spend 4.2% of its GDP on defence, and defence is one of the key battlegrounds in its upcoming general election. Interestingly, the more than doubling of defence spend is being spent not only modernising equipment but on increasing the size of its Armed Forces, and in particular its territorial defence reserve, which is set to increase in size from 32,000 to 50,000.

Poland recognises that one of the lessons from Ukraine is the need for a strong reserve, and that throughout history, not just in Ukraine, wars are started with regulars but finished with reservists. Our NATO allies recognise that as well. France has announced that it is planning to more than double its reserves from 40,000 to 100,000, which includes a proposal for an industrial reserve corps to backfill defence industries with up to 2,000 reservists if they need to expand for war. Germany is also expanding to a 100,000 reserve, plus expanding the liability on others so that it can theoretically call on 950,000 reservists in extremis. The reservist retirement age is 65. Denmark is increasing reserves from the current manning of 28,500 to 62,200. Estonia has 4,000 active reserves, mirroring its 4,000 regular force, with 40,000 trained passive reserves and 230,000 enrolled on a mobilisation registry. There is a common theme: all our Allies' reserve armies are potentially bigger than the regular force. It makes sense: reserves are a cost-effective way of maintaining mass and skills at an appropriate readiness.

So what, your Lordships may ask, is the situation in the United Kingdom? On paper, the Army Reserve is 32,000, with no plans to increase its size. In reality, it is smaller and declining in number every month. It was not always the case; following the *Future Reserves 2020* review we saw major investment in our reserve, and, between 2015 and 2019, numbers of the Army Reserve grew substantially. It probably helped that the Minister for the Armed Forces at the time was particularly interested in reserves.

The Reserve Forces Review 2030 that I chaired tried to build on this "down and in" success by looking "up and out", recognising that Reserve Forces are the ideal medium to access skills and talent that the regular force simply cannot hold. This, too, has been a success. Today's Reserve is no longer just a contingent capability to be held at low readiness; it is also a pool of talented individuals, many of whom act as auxiliaries, bringing their skills to support defence on a daily basis. One of our proposals in the review was to adopt the concept of a spectrum of service for individuals, recognising that, throughout their working career, they should be able to move in and out of uniformed service—be that regular, Reserve or civilian life—gaining skills and experience without necessarily being penalised. Remarkably, sometimes it can be quite difficult for an ex-regular to join the Reserve.

I am delighted that this concept has been picked up by the recent Haythornthwaite review in terms of service with our Armed Forces, but if there is just one message that I hope noble Lords take away from my contribution, it is that today's Army Reserve is a very different beast from the Territorial Army of the past, and contributes to defence outputs on a daily basis. I have every confidence that the current decline in Army Reserve numbers can be reversed, but the Reserve needs to be invested in both financially and conceptually.

I sensed at times that the Army was never quite sure what it wanted from its Reserve. The new NATO force model of graduated readiness is a building block for that clarity. However, there remain challenges to it. I will name but two. First, the MoD financial model always puts Reserves at risk. Reserves, unlike regulars,

[LORD LANCASTER OF KIMBOLTON]

are a variable cost and Reserve service days are always at risk of being cut. Who would want to stay in the Reserves and not be able to train? Secondly, we always seek to mirror the Reserve to the regular force in both training and structure. I am delighted that the Army proposes to end that direct equivalence, and regulars and Reserves should integrate at the point of use in one Army, but have the flexibility to be organised and trained in different ways to suit the institutions.

I end by simply saying that, after 35 years of Army Reserve service, it will be my pleasure in October to enter what will be my last job in the Army, as director of Army Reserves—effectively the head of the institution—so this will probably be my last contribution on the Reserves in this forum, for a while at least. But I am clear what needs to be done and relish the challenge.

12.21 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, in opening, I associate myself with the words of gratitude to the noble Lord, Lord Soames of Fletching, for securing this important debate and add my words of admiration for his excellent introductory speech.

In essence, today's debate is about the measurement of aspiration against reality. The simple questions are: does the UK have the military resource it needs to meet our obligations and can we, in fact, defend our country and its interests in a fracturing, increasingly multipolar world?

The Command Paper published in July outlined the geographical and strategic breadth of the challenges we face. Our ability to shape events in our favour depends on our military, our participation in NATO and other bilateral defence relationships and our new Indo-Pacific tilt. NATO is critical in this context. In theory, the UK is supposed to have the capacity to provide a warfighting division to NATO if needed. When asked about the readiness of our warfighting 3rd Division before the Defence Select Committee in July, the CDS responded by saying, that the “vehicles are really old”, the division is “lighter than we want” and that, in order to offer much more than a brigade in this scenario, we would need the gap to be filled by our allies.

Our position of influence within NATO is not static. If our capacity weakens, our influence will weaken with it. It is no accident that General Sir Tim Radford, who was, until July, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, warns that at present, cuts to the size of the UK's Armed Forces mean that we are only “just holding on” to our leadership role within the alliance.

This reflects the consequences of a wider set of political choices. The number of total deployable active-duty personnel is smaller than the US Marine Corps and is smaller, in fact, than at any time since the Napoleonic Wars. A senior US general earlier this year said that the shrinking of numbers in our military meant that we were barely a tier 2 military power, let alone a realistic aspirant to tier 1 status.

The conflict in Ukraine has upended any hypothesis suggesting that sophisticated military technology has rendered the role of soldiers, sailors and airmen obsolete. I understand that, as in all areas of life, technology

diminishes the need for human agency, but the size of our Armed Forces is still a factor in assessing their strength. The British Armed Forces are simply too small. This is not a fringe or minority view, but one shared by several former Chiefs of the Defence Staff. It is especially concerning that we continue to face recruitment challenges even when overall numbers are so small. This is true across all three services, with figures to March this year showing an intake decline of 14.6% for the Army, 16.6% for the RAF and around 22% for the Navy. Like others, I hope that the Government's response to the Haythornthwaite report will see significant progress made in this area.

In today's economic context, spending decisions are not between good or bad, but between necessary and urgent. In preparation for these proceedings, I had occasion to look back at other recent debates, both in your Lordships' House and in the other place, on these issues. In addressing concerns around our military capacity, the ministerial answers I read frequently sought to encompass two irreconcilable positions. We have been told, often in the same statement, that economic stringency imposes regrettable restrictions on our ability to build the defence capacity we need, while being just as solemnly assured that our existing capacity is adequate, indeed ample, to meet all foreseeable needs. That is like having at the same time a Dickensian miser whispering in one ear and Dr Pangloss in the other. If our current capabilities are indeed ample, restrictions are not regrettable but responsible. If they are not, we must revise the scale of our ambition accordingly.

During my time as Secretary of State for Defence, I had the privilege to meet countless service personnel, and was always awed by their dedication, courage, patriotism and resilience. We often ask our troops to do the impossible, and with startling frequency they do just that. In speaking, I seek not to question their bravery but to ensure that the three services have what they need to engage with maximum effectiveness the challenges posed by our strategic adversaries.

12.26 pm

Lord Alderdice (LD): My Lords, I declare my interest as executive chairman of the Changing Character of War Centre at Pembroke College, Oxford—and that is the issue with which I start. The nature of war has not changed since ancient times. It involves the use of force and, arguably, the threat of the use of force, by one group against another. It also requires resistance by those under attack: without that resistance, there is merely a rout. War also implies an intensity and duration to the conflict. None of this is new and none of it has gone away. However, the character of war changes with each new technological and tactical development, but these do not necessarily obviate all previous technologies and tactics. This was the mistake of these so-called “new wars” theorists, who, in the 1980s and 1990s, announced that major wars were now obsolete: there would be terrorism and other attacks by non-state actors, but inter-state war was no longer an international policy option. This was wishful thinking.

Another mistaken view was expressed by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who in the other place in November 2021 claimed that the days of big tank

battles and land wars in Europe were over, and mocked his party colleague Tobias Ellwood, the chairman of the Defence Select Committee, for expressing concern about the cuts to British military capabilities. Three months later, Russia invaded Ukraine.

Old methods are never given up completely. Wars started on land, moved to sea and then airspace, and now to the cyberspace created by human beings. We have added to the spaces where wars may be conducted, but we have not abandoned the original spaces. So it is with the technology of war. We add new ways of attacking and resisting, but the old ways always remain available. Be suspicious of the credibility of anyone who says otherwise.

My second point is that the use of force is the one area where the state must maintain a monopoly and a convincing capacity. With healthcare, education, transport and many other social requirements, we may wish, and increasingly have wished, the state to provide, supply and manage them, but in none of them is a state monopoly essential or even, in my view, desirable. With increasing internal disruption and defending against external attack, it is crucial that the state maintains its monopoly. The recent coup attempt by the Wagner mercenaries in Russia shows what happens when a state allows any other model of the management of physical force.

In addition, the naive assumption that major war has gone away and that government is merely about providing domestic services is seriously mistaken and dangerous. If adequate resources are not provided for the defence of our country and our interests abroad against internal and external threats, a time will come when we will not be able to protect ourselves against attack.

This became the case with Europe, which for decades largely left it to the United States to be its protective umbrella, but no country has friends and benefactors who can be depended upon permanently to fulfil such a role. Countries have allies who will work with them when it is in their interests, not friends who will sacrifice themselves for no other reason than friendship. Our defence collaboration was never going to be based on the EU but on NATO as a defence alliance—and one that we nearly lost through neglect.

Finally, I want to say something about people. There is currently a superficially attractive notion that, with technology, we will be able to defend ourselves with a diminishing corps of people in our military. This is very ill-advised. There are many arguments already being made in this debate about the need to have enough people to operate the ships, planes, tanks and computers that we need, as well as those who can be called upon to apply military discipline and organisation to assist the civil power with the increasing incidence of pandemics, natural disasters and, in some cases, I am afraid, civil disturbance and illegal immigration. However, there is another aspect to it. If a significant section of our population have served in some capacity, they, their families and their communities have a very special sense of the value of their country and the need to take risks and sometimes make sacrifices to protect it and to defend our freedoms, culture, way of life and interests abroad.

Many people in our country no longer understand the need for this. They think that we managed in the past and that technology will save us in the future. Others live in a world that they wish existed rather than in the troublesome world of humanity that actually exists, with all its dangerous and unsavoury characters as well as the good people. Still others assume that we are all rational actors who will, in the end, weigh up the social and economic costs and benefits and act on those. In the context of war and existential threat, we as individuals and communities become devoted actors, not rational actors. Indeed, if we do not, our community will likely not survive.

12.31 pm

Lord Dannatt (CB): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Soames, on securing this important and timely debate. I thank him for concentrating his remarks on the commitment and excellence of our soldiers, sailors, Air Force personnel and marines. As the war in Ukraine has demonstrated so starkly, it is the morale and determination of those in military uniform which results in success or failure on the battlefield.

However, we need to place what our excellent service people do on a daily basis in the context of the real world which is around us. The refresh of the integrated review earlier this year confirmed the tilt towards the Indo-Pacific and the need to support our allies and friends in that region in the face of an expansionist China. There is the unfinished business of confronting Islamist militancy in the Middle East and increasingly in Africa. Dominating across all environments is our support for Ukraine in defeating Russian aggression. This broadens out to our vital participation in NATO and other multinational commitments and the need for sustained deterrent deployments, such as in Estonia and Poland.

All this comes at a cost, especially in the land environment, which remains so poorly underinvested. In this month's edition of the Army's in-house magazine, *Soldier*, I was not surprised to read this:

"Talk to personnel in any section of the British Army at the moment and there is one piece of feedback you'll hear over and over again; everyone is being asked to do more with less".

Some will say it was ever thus, but I disagree. There have been times in the recent past when there was a balance between commitments and resources. Eventually this came right, at the height of the two campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, but that was with an Army of over 100,000 regular soldiers and an Army Reserve near its recruited strength of 30,000. Today, we are not engaged in major combat operations ourselves but the criticism is still there: everyone is being asked to do more with less.

Is it any wonder that there is this imbalance when the Regular Army is on course to reduce to 73,000 soldiers and the Army Reserve is down to around 26,000? The ultimate illustration of "more with less" must surely be the situation in 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, a close-support artillery regiment in 3rd Division—supposedly our one deployable war-fighting division. That regiment has no operational guns. An artillery regiment with no guns is truly reminiscent of the inter-war years, when football rattles replaced machine guns in training.

[LORD DANNATT]

I exaggerate somewhat to make my point. We have gifted 32-tracked AS90 self-propelled artillery guns to Ukraine, but what about the replacement capability? That is what the commanding officer of 1st RHA needs to tell his soldiers about. It is a Swedish system called Archer. We have bought 14 of these wheeled vehicles and, all being well, they will be in service next November. What about our tracked Warrior infantry fighting vehicles? There was no money for a mid-life upgrade, so they are to be retired and a wheeled alternative introduced instead. Is the plan to upgrade only 148 of our Challenger 2 main battle tanks to Challenger 3 capability enough? Frankly, I mind less about the reduction in our manpower than I do about the reduction in our equipment.

Of course, there are those who would say that armoured fighting vehicles are oh-so 20th century and that the future is with hi-tech drones, clever imagery and high-speed communications, and of course they are right. However, the sad and expensive fact of life that Chancellors and Defence Secretaries must confront is that, as the conflict in Ukraine is showing, the new ways of warfare are not replacing the old ways of warfare but complementing them. A blending of the old chin-to-chin slugging match is as important today as the hi-tech developments of the 21st century. Satellite-informed button-pressing long-range firepower is in lockstep today in Ukraine with brutal gutter-fighting with bayonet, grenade and short-range drones. There are no revolutionary silver bullets. We are told that there is to be an investment in Army programmes—the Future Soldier programme—but largely towards the end of the decade. Is that good enough or soon enough? In any event, that programme must not be subject to further cuts when the squeeze comes.

In the 1930s, there was the threat of a dictator rising in Europe. We chose to appease him. Too late, we began to re-arm. Mercifully, just in time, we produced enough fighter aircraft to win the Battle of Britain. However, the British Army, undermanned, undertrained, underequipped and transported in wheeled lorries, faced an armoured enemy that had embraced the then new technology of the main battle tank. In May and June 1940, our Army was defeated in France and escaped annihilation via Dunkirk. Today, there is a new dictator in Europe—not just a threat but a proven aggressor. Are we re-arming? Are we increasing our defence expenditure? Are we taking our defence responsibilities seriously? In 1935, we spent 3% of GDP on defence. Today, it is not even 2.5%. By 1939 we were spending 18%, and in 1940 it was 46%. Does history have to repeat itself? I sincerely hope not.

12.37 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as a vice-chair of the All-Party Group on Bosnia-Herzegovina and as a member of the PSVI advisory board at the FCO. I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Soames of Fletching for tabling this debate. At a time when we are facing the most complex geopolitical situation since the Cold War, and with the knowledge and experience of this House, which we have just witnessed, we should have a regular opportunity to debate and challenge our collective assumptions.

In the last decade, we have seen extraordinary changes take place: leaving the European Union, the occupation of part of a European country by its neighbour, the emergence of a more assertive and aggressive China, and new technologies changing the nature of war-fighting. Now we have a new Defence Secretary, who will have to master all this. However, as he faces new threats, some of our most serious challenges are persistent problems and some of them need conventional answers.

I will focus on two issues: the role of our Armed Forces in preserving peace and security in the western Balkans, as predicted by my noble friend Lord Soames, and the role that they can play in addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

Russia is engaged in political meddling and malign influence in the western Balkans, projecting influence through military assistance to its main partner, Serbia, while supporting the militarisation of the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska. Lacking a direct military presence on the ground, Russia supports far-right nationalist organisations, a mix of organised crime and paramilitary groups, encouraging polarisation and stirring up anti-western sentiment. Its ultimate aim is to keep the region constantly unstable and under its influence. This is most visible in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which faces sustained attempts by Russian-backed secessionists to undermine its sovereignty and stability.

A war in Bosnia, were it to happen, would destabilise the region and bring with it the very scenario that we are keen to avoid: mass displacement of people in Europe, a breakdown of border control and renewed smuggling of people, arms and narcotics, let alone the loss of life and another war in Europe. This is a direct threat to the United Kingdom. To watch it unfold and not deter that scenario would go directly against our own assumptions in the recent Command Paper, which states:

“Putting more ships to sea, planes in air and people around the globe to operate in contested areas imposes costs on our adversaries, and ultimately—and crucially—reduces costs to ourselves”.

In the case of the western Balkans, we are talking not about ships or planes but about the redeployment of the British Army contingents that left EUFOR after Brexit, when we ceased our contribution to Operation Althea, the international military mission in support of a safe and secure environment in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I hope that the Government will show leadership and rejoin and bolster this critical stabilisation force to ensure that it provides a credible deterrent to violence. I hope my noble friend the Minister can share the Government’s assessment of the threat of instability in the western Balkans and what steps they deem necessary to address any such threat.

Conflict-related sexual violence destroys lives and undermines peace and security. It is not just an individual tragedy: it affects whole communities and nations and threatens prospects for long-term stability. We have seen it in Iraq, Syria, Myanmar and Ethiopia, recently in Ukraine and now, as I speak, once again in Darfur. Our Armed Forces must play their role in taking leadership in countering this heinous crime.

As part of the high-level review of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the MoD made a commitment to ensure that, by November 2016, all pre-deployment

training for our forces would include women, peace and security and PSVI in the agenda. I know that some of the Ukrainian troops being trained in the United Kingdom have received human security training. Can my noble friend confirm to the House that this commitment made in 2015 has been honoured and that this is still the case eight years later, and that it is a standard part of our training package, whether for our forces or in engagement with allied and partner forces?

I am running out of time, so I will say just one thing. Men and women of the Armed Forces defend and protect our freedom every day of every year. Much of that we never see, and we take it for granted. For that, we owe them and their families immense gratitude.

12.42 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for his excellent starting point for this debate, which many of us on this side of the House would wholly agree with in every way. I do not have the experience of military service and defence questions that many Members of this House have, but I share the admiration that he expressed for the people in our armed services. When I was a humble adviser in No. 10, working on the defence review, Charles Guthrie, Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, took me to Banja Luka in Bosnia to look at the conditions in which our people had to work. I had tremendous admiration for that. He then insisted that I go and get on board one of Admiral West's frigates. Somehow or other, I managed to climb up a rope ladder to get on and take a look.

It was always a struggle then, in 1997 under the Blair Government, to argue for an increased defence budget. I believed then that we had to have a strong defence budget, and I believe it even more now. But there are always arguments and many other worthy claims—that we have to spend more on overseas aid, or that we have lots of child poverty and pensioner poverty to deal with. At the present conjuncture, our problem with public spending is that we face a huge demographic challenge with increased costs from pensions, health and social care, and the existential, longer-term challenge of climate change, which we have to address and will be expensive.

I must say that, in the present situation, I find all the chatter about tax cuts rather unrealistic—let us put it like that. I believe that we must have a stronger defence budget, but it will be difficult. If there is a change of Government, it will be as difficult on our side as it has been. I remember the sessions we had in No. 10 at every public spending round on what department budgets should be, and I was the only one of the political advisers in No. 10 who fought for a higher defence budget. Fortunately, I had a single ally—the Prime Minister. I hope we can get a bigger defence budget in the years ahead, but defence has to make the case for that. It has to reform where there are obvious weaknesses. We must shake up the procurement system and get on top of those problems.

Secondly, I agree totally with the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton of Richmond, that we must have realism about what we can achieve in the world.

We have to balance realism and resources in a sensible way. I am a bit sceptical about the return east of Suez: is that really where Britain should be putting its efforts? Reading the recent defence White Paper, I could not understand why we were increasing the size of our nuclear arsenal. We need a minimum deterrent—I have fought unilateralism all my life in politics—but our deterrent should be as minimal in cost as it possibly can be, yet the Government were proposing an increase in expenditure.

Here is the thing I worry about the most—I know that people have a long and noble history of Anglo-American co-operation and do not like this. I look at the opinion polls in the United States, and Biden might be 1% ahead of Trump. The prospect of another Trump presidency is very real. The prospect of a party that believes that America should become isolationist and withdraw from Europe is very real. We have to get our act together with our European partners. I know that this is difficult because of Brexit but, for me, this is an absolutely key priority in the defence field, given the situation we now face. So, yes, defence has to be a priority. It will be extremely difficult to make it one, but our future in Europe depends on it.

12.48 pm

Lord Craig of Radley (CB): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Soames, on his fine introduction to this important debate. Two MoD reports published this summer received much less attention than the revised DCP. These were concerned with personnel issues, the continuous attitude survey, and the very comprehensive *Agency and Agility* report. No matter how much is spent on equipment, fighting platforms and war stocks, none will be any use without the men and women of our Armed Forces who use their training, skills and commitment to use them. Personnel are often rightly singled out for praise and admiration by Ministers and others. In return, I believe Ben Wallace deserves praise for his fine performance as Defence Secretary at a particularly difficult time.

As time is short, I return to the *Agency and Agility* report. In the Written Statement to Parliament on 19 June 2023, the Minister agreed with the report's analysis and conclusions. The author's covering note to the Defence Secretary said that he knew that the Chiefs of Staff and other senior leaders were "committed to the change set out in this report".

The report sets forth with a following wind in its sails. I wonder whether it will reach its destination. The last major look at terms of service, and much else to do with personnel, was the Bett report way back in 1994-95. He recommended full acceptance and no cherry picking. It took the Government nearly two years to respond and more than a decade to implement, and then only in part. It is still early days, but have the Government set themselves any target date for a response?

In the vignettes at the end of the report, every individual is expressing job satisfaction. Yet this critical aspect, contributing to good morale, could be even better highlighted in the body of the report. Working for government will hardly ever be paid more than is likely to be available in the private sector for comparable tasks; it will probably be less, even when making

[LORD CRAIG OF RADLEY]

adjustment for pension expectations. So the suggestion that expertise could be financially rewarded regardless of rank will not be the whole story. Rank, too, has status and reward, as well as more pay, as has job satisfaction and working as part of a team.

Long experience of adversity and antipathy to risk taking with public funds may raise difficulties with its encouragement, which Haythornthwaite, the author, proposes. His report recognised the importance in operations of the chain of command, underpinned by service ethos. He seems, perhaps unfairly, to ascribe less importance to ethos in peacetime settings. More thought is given to what is in it for the individual and less to what obligations and undertakings must be given in return to reflect the 24/7 commitment and the Armed Forces Act. His people valuation proposal must have this. It is unique for the Armed Forces. He uses a catchphrase several times to encapsulate his approach:

“Think big, start small, scale fast”.

For the MoD, or any government department, thinking big is a policy ambition. “Start small” is the classic pilot “see if it works” approach. But “scale fast” is rarer than hens’ teeth, maybe triggered only by a pandemic or war. Even the proxy war in Ukraine has not seen procurement scaled fast. Test of success of this report will be delivery of “scale fast”.

This timely report deserves a proactive approach and a determination to take it forward. New thinking of this kind is more essential than ever to get the best from the far too small number of operational platforms and weapons stocks to hand. I was pleased to note the positive references to the Armed Forces covenant. It deserves far more than government is so far prepared to state in statute.

12.53 pm

Lord Tugendhat (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure for me to follow the noble and gallant Lord. Many years ago, he and I worked quite closely together when he was Chief of the Air Staff and I was chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority. The armed services in those days were a great deal larger than they are today.

The Government frequently boast of the help they have given to Ukraine and all they have done to mobilise support for Ukraine, and I congratulate them for everything they have achieved. That comes at a price, of course, and I should like the Minister to tell us what all our help has meant for the British armed services. How much of what we have given has been replaced? Is it true that stocks that we used to count in days are now down to hours? Is it true that if the supplies to our Armed Forces are not transformed in the very near future, we will not be able to sustain our support for Ukraine, nor maintain the present level of training for our troops? I do not expect the Minister to give me chapter and verse in reply, but I should like her to assure the House that the Government are taking urgent steps to re-equip our own Armed Forces to the level of preparedness that they had before the Ukraine war began.

We have no idea how the Ukraine war might develop. We do not know what diversionary or other tactics Russia might deploy. But just suppose that a threat

arises that necessitates the deployment of British and other NATO troops to the Baltic states, to Finland or to Poland. Would our troops in those circumstances be in a state of readiness? Would they be credible as a deterrent force? I should like the Minister to give her view on that.

In the light of the present situation, with a land war in Europe and continuous tension in Asia, can it be right to stick with a target of 2% of GDP for the defence budget? While campaigning for the leadership of the Conservative Party last year, Grant Shapps talked in terms of 3%. I believe he was on the right lines then and I hope he will remain on the right lines now. NATO has a target of 2%, but we have committed ourselves to more than most NATO countries with our nuclear deterrent, our very expensive aircraft carriers and our continued involvement in the Far East, exemplified by AUKUS. If that is the league that we wish to play in, we must put up the money to fund it.

I know that Ministers are very busy people and do not have much time to read books. None the less, I would urge the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to read a slim volume entitled *Guilty Men*, which was written by Michael Foot and a number of other people and published in 1940. It excoriated the Ministers in the 1930s who, by failing to re-equip the Armed Forces when there was still time, left them in mortal danger in that year. God forbid that we should ever again face the sort of danger that we faced in 1940, but the skies are darkening, and we owe it to our men and women in uniform to ensure that they are properly equipped for the dangers they might face. That is the first duty of the Government.

12.58 pm

Lord Snape (Lab): My Lords, I join noble Lords on both sides of the House in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for obtaining this debate this morning and endorsing everything he said about the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, a group that is being asked to do more and more with less and less, as has already been indicated.

I joined the British Army as a regular soldier in 1960 when it was 258,000-strong, a figure admittedly swollen by the last National Service men, who had just a year to do. Compare that figure to the forecasted 73,000 outlined by the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt. It is the smallest army since the days of Oliver Cromwell, and yet we are expecting fewer and fewer of those men and women to do more and more with less and less equipment, less and less salary.

I will talk about the three Ms: manpower, including the contribution made by servicewomen, morale and money. On manpower, I have indicated the figures of how small the British Army is becoming. I will compare those with the strength of the British Army and our Armed Forces that the incoming Conservative Government enjoyed back in 2010, using the figures provided by His Majesty’s Government in the UK regular Armed Forces continuous attitude survey results over that period. What a blow to morale has taken place over those 13 years. As reported in Her Majesty’s Government’s figures, in 2010, the last year of the outgoing Labour Government, satisfaction with service

life in general was at 61%. Some 73% of commissioned officers expressed satisfaction with life in the Armed Forces at that time. Compare that with the latest government figures for 2023: only 52% of officers and 42% of other ranks expressed satisfaction with their conditions, pay and life overall in our Armed Forces.

It is an incredible thought to an ex-regular soldier like me that almost half the officers in the British Army are dissatisfied with their conditions and with what they are being asked to do. I say in all sincerity to both sides of the House that, given the task our Armed Forces presently face, the fact that their leaders are so depressed about future prospects ought to give us concern.

Back in 2007, I had an exchange in your Lordships' House with Lord Tebbit. At that time, my noble friend Lord Browne was being attacked for holding down two jobs in the Blair Government. He was both Secretary of State for Scotland and Secretary of State for Defence. Lord Tebbit said, in his forthright way, what an impact it was having on morale in the Armed Forces that the Secretary of State for Defence was, in effect, fulfilling a part-time role. I am surprised we have not heard anything from the Conservative Benches so far on what impact the appointment of the current Secretary of State for Defence has had on the morale of the Armed Forces over the past few days. A man who, under a false name, embarked on a get-rich-quick scheme is now doing his fifth Cabinet job in the course of a year. My former colleagues in the British Army certainly would not be throwing their caps in the air at the thought of such a person being in charge of our Armed Forces. I am amazed that, given the criticism levelled at my noble friend in 2007, not a word has been said about that appointment so far.

The third point I want to make in the short time available is about money. I suspect the Minister, who commands the respect of both sides of the House, will say that the Government have accepted fully the recommendation of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body this year, ignoring the fact that in two previous years, 2018 and 2019, the same Government rejected those figures. They accepted part of them, yet insisted that the country could not afford the pay increase recommended by an independent body. I wonder what impact such a decision had on morale in the Armed Forces generally. If the Minister and her colleagues were all in uniform, I would have them prosecuted under what was Section 69 of the Army Act, for conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline.

1.03 pm

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Soames of Fletching, on securing this debate and on his introduction to it. He may have watched recently, as I did, the film "Oppenheimer". It reminded me of colleagues we have lost—Lord Ramsbotham and Lord Bramall, who, with all their military experience, were staunch advocates of holding the Government to account over their nuclear weapons policy as part of defence. So far in this debate, with the exception of the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, no mention has been made of our nuclear programme.

Last month, Aidan Liddle, the UK ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, gave a statement during the preparatory session for the 10th Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. He said:

"The threat of nuclear proliferation persists. We, as States Parties to the NPT, must work to reduce this threat by strengthening the non-proliferation architecture, combating programmes of concern and building trust between regional neighbours".

So far so good. He gave an extensive commentary on Iran but failed to mention that Israel has a nuclear arsenal, and nor did he mention that India, Pakistan and North Korea have not signed up to the NPT. We are signing a trade agreement with India; we should remind it that signing the NPT is essential.

Currently, nuclear weapons states, including the UK, are engaged in a new modernisation and expansion of their nuclear programmes, in contravention of Article 6 of the NPT. Furthermore, the Trident programme should make all those concerned with our Armed Forces deeply worried; it certainly worries me. The choice of spend is increasingly stark. The MoD paper *Defence's Response to a More Contested and Volatile World* talks of recapitalisation of the nuclear defence strategy, but there remains a trilemma: a choice between increasing the overall MoD budget at the expense of other departments, reducing the spend on conventional weapons and forces or reducing spending on the Trident programme.

That trilemma may have led the Government to conclude that they will welcome the return of US nuclear weapons to UK soil. The American airbase at Lakenheath has seen a lot of activity, which many expert commentators say foreshadows US nuclear weapons being based there. If so, we face the build-up of nuclear arms in Europe. Russia has already escalated matters by using Belarus to extend its nuclear base. These developments mean we will again be a moment away from the nuclear nightmare that hung over us throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

I know that to expect progress on disarmament at this time, given the situation with Russia, would be naive. However, there is still much that can be improved, so I conclude with some questions for the Minister. What would she regard as a successful outcome from the next NPT round? What aspects will the UK Government especially prioritise? Will Parliament be asked to approve the hosting of US nuclear weapons in the British Isles?

1.07 pm

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Soames of Fletching on giving us this welcome opportunity to debate defence. I declare my interest as honorary air commodore of 600 (City of London) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and as an adviser to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. I agree with everything my noble friend said in his moving and inspiring speech.

I also agree with the noble Lord, Lord West of Spithead, in lamenting the Government's inadequate commitment to defence spending. I understand that it is now proposed that the Army be cut to 73,000, although it has been reported in the media that it has been put under pressure to accept further cuts to an

[VISCOUNT TRENCHARD]

even lower level of 70,000, most of them to be borne by the infantry to provide more resources for the artillery, which has been heavily used in Ukraine and whose stockpiles are therefore somewhat depleted.

After Putin's second illegal invasion of Ukraine, my right honourable friend Boris Johnson was quick to respond. We can hold our heads high in the world as a result. The decisive and strong response that the Government took at the time was widely recognised and crucial in bringing on board the ambivalent United States and the divided and lukewarm EU, several of whose member states were very slow to apply sanctions against the Russian regime.

I worry that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has stepped back a little from the commitments his predecessors made to spend more on defence. His commitment to increase defence spending over the next two years by £5 billion was welcome, but his aspiration to reach a level of 2.5% "over time" was decidedly underwhelming. However, this increased spending is relatively insignificant compared with the £52 billion increase that Ben Wallace has spoken about. Besides, I understand that £3 billion of the increase, some 60%, will be deployed to meet the UK's contribution to the AUKUS pact, a trilateral defence agreement with the United States and Australia. Could my noble friend the Minister tell your Lordships what her expectations are of the timeframe within which our defence spending will rise to a level of 2.5% or more?

I also welcome the growing interest of Japan in working ever more closely with AUKUS. There is a new alignment of four liberal democracies emerging, as Australia, Britain, Japan, and the United States increasingly align their security interests to contain and balance the growth of China's influence and power. It is also highly relevant that we have joined forces with Japan and Italy to build the next-generation fighter jet, the Global Combat Air Programme, which brings together our Tempest project with Japan's F-X project.

I want to say how sorry I am that General Sir Patrick Sanders has retired early from his position as Chief of the General Staff. As a former volunteer officer of the Royal Green Jackets myself, I am of course biased, but I know how highly regarded he was in all three services. I was impressed by his view that the Ukraine conflict has reminded us that military conflict is ultimately about holding land—and without enough troops on the ground, you cannot do that. Will the Minister confirm that the Government recognise that point and have taken it on board, as well as other lessons from the Ukraine conflict?

Lastly, based on my experience with my Reserve squadron, I also ask my noble friend for her thoughts on a question that is worrying the leadership of my squadron. How are both regular and Reserve forces in the future going to retain the crucial NCO cadre, who take 10 years to train, against a background where young people expect instant results and tend to change jobs and roles much more often?

1.12 pm

Lord Touhig (Lab): My Lords, I join colleagues in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for securing this debate and for his powerful and insightful introduction. It was direct and to the point—but I think the House would expect nothing less from the noble Lord.

When I had the honour of serving as a Defence Minister, I was responsible for service families, their accommodation and well-being. One thing I soon learned was that, if our service families were happy, our service men and women were happy—and if they were happy, we could send our forces anywhere in the world in defence of our country's interests. But I very much regret that that would be more challenging today, as the morale of our forces continues to decline.

I will focus my comments on the latest Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, which reveals that satisfaction with service life has fallen for the second year in a row. In 2021, the level of service satisfaction was 50%, but since then it has fallen eight points to 42%. Satisfaction with basic pay has fallen considerably in the last two years: down to 31%, the lowest ever recorded. Furthermore, satisfaction with allowances has fallen 19 percentage points since 2021. Just 39% of personnel think the allowances are fair. Just as worrying is the satisfaction with the quality of maintenance and repair of service family accommodation, which has fallen markedly in the last year. Satisfaction with the overall standard of service family accommodation has fallen from 52% to 46%. That is bad news.

The survey is a very thorough piece of work and provides us with vital insights into the attitudes of our service men and women. That brings me to a key point. Throughout my professional and political life, I have held the view that the greatest asset of any organisation is not its IT system, working environment, kit or additional benefits. Its greatest asset is its people. That came home to me very strongly when I was a Welsh Office Minister. An official came in one day and said, "I have some bad news, Minister. One of our RAF fighters has crashed into the sea off the Pembrokeshire coast. The pilot has ejected and is safe". Then he added, "£5 million plane lost; £10 million pilot saved". Those figures are illustrative, not actual; I am afraid that age has prevented me from remembering the exact figures. But the point he was making, and that I want to make, is that we invested far more in the person than the kit, and that it was easy to replace the kit, but we could not easily replace the person.

I make that point because one of the most worrying concerns I have is that the proportion of personnel planning to leave the services has increased for the second year running. The survey suggests they are leaving for a variety of reasons, but I fear it may be because they do not feel valued. Some 24%—a quarter—of personnel surveyed are planning to leave the services.

The survey also reveals that our service men and women do not believe that we will do anything about it. Overall, 48%—almost half—of personnel surveyed say that we will not act on the findings. They believe we will do nothing about their concerns. We must

change this, and we will do that only by taking their concerns seriously and putting right what they see as wrong.

There has been a steady erosion of morale of our Armed Forces for some time now, and for me that is the most urgent problem that needs to be addressed. Failing morale, poor service family accommodation and increasing numbers leaving the forces is a real crisis at the heart of the challenge facing Britain's defence. Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey has said that Britain has to do more of what he termed the "moral component". He said:

"It is not acceptable, but it's also not viable, if your satisfaction ratings are less than 50% of those who are serving".

I welcome his comments, but I stress that I am not seeking to make a party-political point here, because I believe that colleagues on the Conservative Benches and across the House will also be concerned about the failing morale of our Armed Forces. All of us in this House would welcome hearing from His Majesty's Government how they plan to respond to the key points in this survey.

I hope the Minister, who is hugely respected in this House and beyond, and who went out of her way to a great extent to help a former constituent of mine with a problem, will, when she replies to this debate, give us some guidance on what the Government are going to do, so we can say to our servicemen and women of our Armed Forces, "We are listening and we will do something about your concerns".

1.17 pm

Lord Lee of Trafford (LD): My Lords, Ben Wallace, in his recent resignation letter, said:

"The Ministry of Defence is back on the path to being once again world class with world class people".

Well, certainly, some world-class people and units, but hardly world-class procurement or use of manpower. On procurement, the recent Defence Select Committee report in July was scathing:

"We have discovered a UK procurement system which is highly bureaucratic, overly stratified, far too ponderous, with an inconsistent approach to safety, very poor accountability and a culture which appears institutionally averse to individual responsibility. We agree with the previous conclusions of the Public Accounts Committee from November 2021 that our procurement system is indeed 'broken'. We believe the system is now in need of major, comprehensive reform".

Turning to manning levels, in a Written Answer to me in June, the noble Baroness disclosed that 28% of combined military and civilian personnel were civilian—in other words, 60,000. Indeed, over the last five years, that number has risen from 58,000, despite a reduction in service personnel, a reduction in bases and major advances in communication systems such as videoconferencing. It is difficult to think of any other similar large employer that has not reduced headcount during this period. Compared with our 28%, the figure in France is only 23%. So is it not time to bring in a very senior and experienced external team to look at our procurement processes and seemingly bloated civilian manning levels? I do not believe that the MoD can or will do the necessary itself. The Defence Select Committee looked at Israel, admittedly a more modern nation starting from scratch. It noted:

"The Israeli system, which places a premium on efficient use of manpower, by effective use of contractors, manages to achieve similar outcomes ... but with far fewer people".

Turning to resources and defence priorities, I expect virtually all participants in today's debate to support increased defence spending given our very dangerous world, with so many flashpoints apart, of course, from the appalling conflict in Ukraine. But, in a nation that has lived above its means for years, all departments argue for more spend. Thus we must ruthlessly focus on defence priorities and, sadly and inevitably, employment considerations writ large. Would Gordon Brown have given approval for our new carriers were Scottish jobs not involved? Should we really be planning the next generation of manned fighter aircraft given the rapid growth of unmanned vehicles in the air and at sea? I suggest that we have been behind the curve in the development of UAVs, well behind the USA and Israel, probably also Turkey and maybe even Iran. Just look at drone usage in Ukraine. Are we building up our capability and stocks as fast as we should? Where to spend defence cash is never easy. Looking back, I do not criticise the decision to reduce our tank numbers. It was not an unreasonable assumption that a major European land war was very unlikely. Who foresaw a Russian invasion say five years ago?

On Ukraine, we have to stay the course however long it may be. We are hugely impressed and humbled by the spirit of the Ukrainian people and the bravery of their forces, and perhaps there should also be a word of sympathy for young Russians press-ganged into a war against their will. I hope that one day there will be some form of negotiated peace. If Ukraine is understandably opposed to ceding any territory in a negotiation, perhaps a stay on Ukraine's NATO membership might be sensible for a limited period, if only as a sop to Russia.

Finally, I have three or four specific questions for the Minister. First, what percentage of our Armed Forces currently receive an annual dental check? Secondly, who will pay for the repairs to HMS "Prince of Wales"? If it is the MoD, why? Thirdly, what plans can she talk about to build up our reserves, given the embarrassing comparisons made by the noble Lord, Lord Lancaster, a little earlier? Finally, can she give an indication of the number of F35s currently in service and the number on order?

1.22 pm

Lord Richards of Herstmonceux (CB): My Lords, the Government talk of the UK having military effect globally and of Britain being a global power, yet our Armed Forces have never been weaker or less credible. We have no discernible grand strategy on which to base our defence strategy, other than post-imperial pretensions drawn from a political slogan, "Global Britain", a conceit our ailing economy cannot hope to fund.

The strategically confused integrated review was meant to bring order to our defence posture. Its failings were neatly summed up by Professor Paul Cornish of Exeter University, who called his essay on the subject *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. He emphasised that, given their size and capability shortcomings, the Armed Forces could not hope to do all the things being asked of them.

[LORD RICHARDS OF HERSTMONCEUX]

In his resignation letter, Mr Wallace implied that things were not as he hoped. He wrote:

“The Ministry of Defence is back on the path”—

I say again, “back on the path”—

“to being once again world class”.

He went on:

“I genuinely believe that over the next decade the world will get more insecure and more unstable”.

He is right.

Last year the MoD was given an additional £24 billion. Earlier this year it was allocated a further £5 billion over the next two years, followed by £2 billion per year over the subsequent three years—a total of an additional £11 billion. The House of Commons Library usefully informs us that, adjusted for inflation, this amounts in real terms to only an additional £1.1 billion. The nuclear enterprise AUKUS, together with the replenishment of stockpiles gifted to Ukraine, will consume all the additional money. Day-to-day spending is set to reduce by 6.1% or just over £2 billion over the four years of the current programme. The outcome will be a continuing decline in the size, effectiveness and morale of the Armed Forces.

I could talk of the tragedy of lives lost unnecessarily because of soldiers being sent to fight wars in insufficient numbers and with inadequate equipment. I could, I think, rightly bang the table and insist that, to avoid this, defence must get 2.5% of GDP now, but I am a realist. Given the huge pressures on the Exchequer, it is not going to happen—anyway, even 3% of our current GDP would be insufficient. No, the deduction is clear. It is a grand strategic imperative, not simply an economic one, to build a vigorous high-growth economy. This requirement must be placed ruthlessly at the heart of government policy. It is not just because this is the only way to afford the NHS or an ever-bigger welfare bill but for the sake of our security: 2% of the GDP of a booming economy will pay for the Armed Forces needed to protect our way of life, but 2% of a sluggish economy never will.

In the interim, it is vital that we cut our defence coat to our economic cloth. This country must stop deluding itself that it can have a global role. We are a medium-sized country with a faltering economy. The UK must focus ruthlessly on the Euro-Atlantic theatre, not state that this is our priority but then spread our efforts so thinly that we are strong nowhere. Our predecessors faced a similar moment in the 1960s. Denis Healey had the moral courage to devise a new strategy that saw the UK withdraw from east of Suez. He tailored the Armed Forces to their NATO obligations. With an open and inquiring mind, our new Defence Secretary, Mr Grant Shapps, has the opportunity and, I argue, the responsibility to be our generation's Denis Healey. In so doing, the UK can become once again the second most important state and de facto European leader of the alliance, we can free up some American assets to allow the Americans better to confront the challenge of China on our collective behalf and, importantly, we will recover lost influence in Europe.

In sum, let our economy genuinely be at the heart of a much-needed post-Brexit grand strategy. The ends, ways and means of the associated defence strategy

must be kept responsibly in balance throughout. This will mean focusing single-mindedly on NATO, where we will gain most strategically and have most tactical effect should deterrence fail, ensuring in the process, as the war in Ukraine signals daily, that mass as well as technology determines the size and shape of our Armed Forces.

1.28 pm

Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie (Con): My Lords, I add my thanks and congratulations to my noble friend Lord Soames for securing this debate and for his very moving introduction. I rise as a recent graduate of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, where I have just spent a year with the Navy. It is perhaps a better perk of this House than the free copy of the *New Statesman*. I joined the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, and particularly the Navy, because I wanted to understand the importance of defence and the Armed Forces for Scotland. I do not need to tell my noble friend the Minister that Scottish skills, expertise and innovation make an enormous contribution to the UK's defence industry, with massive benefits for our national security and economy.

His Majesty's naval base on the Clyde has delivered the UK's continuous at-sea deterrent remarkably safely and securely for over 50 years. More than that, the base is one of the largest employers in Scotland. Scotland has a thriving defence and security industry. Every Royal Navy submarine in service since 1917 has been fitted with a periscope or optronics mast manufactured on the Clyde. The Dreadnought version continues this tradition through the defence contract awarded to Thales, in Glasgow, just the other day.

In noting the importance of the role of the Armed Forces in Scotland and the union benefits of our defence policy for Scotland, I also note, like other noble Lords, the importance of our military personnel. During my year with the Navy, it was very obvious to me—and as other noble Lords have said—that our people are undoubtedly our single most impressive asset, from the keenness and excitement of the raw recruits who I met to the knowledge and experience of our commanders. It cannot be right that, in today's world, where we expect recruits to complete some of their learning online, our bases cannot deliver reliable wifi. Nor can it be right that you cannot be guaranteed a hot shower when you come off exercise because there is no hot water in your building. Frankly, it is a disgrace that there have been times when there has been no sea access at Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth. The recent Ofsted report pointed to a “lack of adequate support” from the MoD, to the extent that Ofsted felt that the captain and senior team in charge at the college could not be held responsible for

“lamentable failings in maintenance, renovation and refurbishment”.

I am afraid that we are letting our people down.

We must also value those who support our military personnel. While the Navy asks the Royal Fleet Auxiliary to do more and more, its terms and conditions are out of step with comparable civilian services and really should be looked at before it is faced with a recruitment crisis and operational capacity is affected.

As the very proud parent of a recently commissioned reservist Guards officer, I welcome the remarks of my noble friend Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton, because I have been astounded at the way that the military engages—or, frankly, does not engage—with the civilian employers of reservists. As the number of service personnel shrinks and the population at large lose personal, family connections to the military, it is even more important that our Armed Forces seek to engage co-operatively with the civilian world and that the Government and the MoD ensure that our people are properly supported and valued, given the challenges that we face.

I pay tremendous tribute to the role of the Armed Forces. It was an enormous privilege to be on the Navy course of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme last year—I commend it to all noble Lords who have not done it yet. As a proud Scot, I was delighted to see the contribution that Scotland makes. I believe that the United Kingdom is punching above its weight, which is a source of immense pride. However, I fear that, if we do not address some of these issues and put our money where our mouth is in valuing our people, we will not be able to punch above our weight for much longer.

1.32 pm

Lord Walker of Aldringham (CB): My Lords, I also join in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for leading this debate so powerfully.

In a generation, the British soldier has fought across the Falkland Islands, delivering the combat power carried on his shoulders. He has steadfastly, and without favour, absorbed bullets, bombs, fire and venom in Northern Ireland for some 32 years. He has driven massed armour into the depths of a fortified enemy in a Middle Eastern desert, having calmly waited for it for 40 years on the north German plain. He has hunted terrorists in the Hindu Kush. He has kept his reputation in the Balkans, while others have lost theirs. He has snatched hostages from the swamps of Sierra Leone and the embassies of Kensington. He has fed refugees, slaughtered sheep, put out fires, guarded prisons, cleared domestic rubbish, driven tankers, built hospitals and fought floods.

That CV shows that our Armed Forces are required to support a wide range of national policies, from fighting a well-equipped army—such as that of Saddam Hussein—in high-intensity conflict, through counter insurgency and terrorism, to peace support operations and humanitarian relief. There is no reason to believe that these types of demands being placed on our Armed Forces will not continue. We cannot predict what the future will present us with but, as history demonstrates, it will certainly be unexpected.

Unfortunately, there is no one size fits all for equipping, manning and training an army for such a wide span of commitments. Our Army has been one optimised for the most difficult and complex form of warfare—we call it war-fighting. By this, I mean that it has been structured and trained to fight a war, equipped with the firepower, mobility and protection that is needed on the high-intensity battlefield and continually seeking the best available technology to ensure that it can

orchestrate all these measures and exploit them to best effect, and having the resilience to provide for sustained losses.

War-fighting has been our Army's engine; other operations are about gear selection. That means tanks, artillery pieces, armoured personnel carriers and attack helicopters, last used for real 10 years ago when we fought Saddam Hussein and very nearly used against the Serbs in Kosovo. There is no clearer demonstration of this potential need than the war between Russia and Ukraine. It is worth remembering that there remain some 80,000 operational tanks in the world, of which we have fewer than 160.

I have three final points. First, our seat at the highest political and military tables and the influence that we may wish to bring to bear on world events are absolutely predicated on our credibility as a nation that has serious, balanced, expeditionary war-fighting forces. Our capabilities, as we have heard, have already been called into question by many commentators and American generals. It will be no good preparing for the war that we want to fight; we should prepare for the war that we have to fight.

Secondly, the price of failure in a peace support operation in some far-flung place, as we have seen, will be painful but probably containable. The price of failure in something such as the Gulf War would most likely be catastrophic for the nation. This price would certainly be out of all proportion to the price of proper preparation beforehand.

Thirdly, in the United Kingdom, political will continues to be manifest in a policy-driven defence review—integrated, strategic or whatever—with a deliberate, judgment-based and scientific estimate of the level and range of military capability required to meet the extant will. The weakness of our Armed Forces lies not in their design but in the level of resources applied to them, as we have heard. Political will, force design and resource levels are simply not aligned. Defence bureaucracy is psychologically inclined to short-term pragmatism and does not invest sufficient energy in competing for the necessary resources. It is culturally adept at blurring the distinction between affordability and military efficacy.

We must establish a pure and simple method of gaining real visibility of this predicament and be prepared to expose the true military consequences of a failure to invest properly in our Armed Forces in a politically effective way. The existing processes, attitudes and schedules are not optimised to do this. Instead, they are geared to managing decline. We see this day by day and, if it continues, it will take a great deal of resources, time and money to regenerate our forces to the right level.

1.38 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble and gallant Lord. The week before last, I was in India speaking at the B20 in Delhi. Our Prime Minister leaves today for the G20 in Delhi. I hope we will soon have a free trade agreement signed between the UK and India.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for leading this important debate, which is extremely timely. The Government's *Defence's Response to a More Contested*

[LORD BILIMORIA]
and Volatile World, published in July this year, says very clearly, right upfront in the ministerial foreword, that:

“We are proud of the role the UK is playing in supporting Ukraine in this fight. They are not only defending the international rules-based system on our behalf, but in many ways they are proving the way for warfare in the 2020s – whole of nation, internationally partnered, innovative, digitised and operating with tempo, precision and range. In turn, we are providing Ukraine with equipment, training and political support. We have galvanised European and international, governmental and industrial partners to do likewise. We are campaigning globally”.

Defence’s purpose is to protect the nation, help it to prosper, shape the international environment, deter, defend and compete across all domains, address vulnerability of civilians and generate strategic advantage. Yet it is our minimum credible independent nuclear deterrent which is assigned to the defence of NATO that works every single hour of every day to guarantee our security and that of our NATO allies.

However, the total number of active duty personnel is under 150,000, which is smaller than the US Marine Corps. Many would argue that the weakness of the Government’s Command Paper is that it reverses ends and means. Change is desperately needed, given the challenges from Russia and China, and our budget is far too small. Our Royal Navy has fewer than 30,000 and the Army is getting down to 72,000. The Royal Air Force—I am proud to be an honorary group captain in 601 Squadron—is fewer than 30,000. The total is just 133,000.

There is a delay with the F35 Lightning II fighter jets—there should be 48 of them. Can the Minister tell us when we will reach that number? We will now have fewer than 150 tanks. What is great news is that we are embarking on joint exercises. The Royal Air Force joined five other nations in the UK’s biggest aerial exercise, with 70 aircraft flown by six nations in March this year. I was delighted that it was called Exercise Cobra Warrior.

In 2019—I am like a stuck record—in the debate on the 70th anniversary of NATO I called for our expenditure to go up to 3%. I shall continue being a stuck record. AUKUS has been a superb security pact between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom for the Indo-Pacific region. Sir Stephen Lovegrove has said that the submarine element of the partnership was

“perhaps the most significant capability collaboration anywhere in the world in the past six decades”.

Does the Minister not think that the UK should join the Quad—the USA, Japan, Australia and India? That would be a wonderful global partnership.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, before leaving, said that Ukraine has, tragically, become a “battle lab” and that lessons learned would inform the future of Britain’s Armed Forces—in particular, drone defence and artillery. He pointed out that, at the end of the Second World War, 35% of the Army was artillery and that it is now only 8%. Are we learning those lessons?

In conclusion, £45.9 billion spending on defence is not enough. Yes, we may be spending the minimum 2% NATO requirement but, actually, given all the threats that there are in the world, the alliances

are crucial, and NATO is crucial. Let us not go further than the Royal Gallery and the battle of Waterloo, and that wonderful painting. Without Marshal Blücher arriving, the Duke of Wellington would not have won the Battle of Waterloo. We need the alliances, we respect NATO and we are proud to be part of NATO.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Richards, mentioned that the UK was a medium-sized economy. Much as I respect him, I put it to your Lordships that we are not a superpower. There are only two superpowers: the United States and China; and one more emerging, India, which I predict by 2060 will be the largest economy in the world. But we are still the sixth-largest economy in the world and at the top table of the world, whether it is the G7 or the G20. We are the second-largest power in NATO. Most importantly, we have the strongest elements of soft power, whether it is the Royal Family, our Premier League football, the BBC or our universities. But soft power without hard power is absolutely useless. We need to support and invest in our Armed Forces and enforce that precious covenant between the public and the Armed Forces and we must never take them for granted. We must spend a minimum of 3% of GDP right now.

1.43 pm

Lord Balfe (Con): My Lords, I too begin by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for initiating this debate. It is a pleasure to have him among us, and we are very lucky that he has come from the other place to join us. I am sure that his contribution will be widely appreciated over the years to come.

Two themes have come through very clearly: that we are not spending enough and that the Army and the military forces, including the Navy, are just not big enough for what we are trying to do. Those points have been made by several people. I want to concentrate on what I call the need for realism, because our attitude in defence is often pretty unreal. On its own, the UK cannot really do very much at all; we have to work in an alliance and in alliances with other like-minded countries. That is point one.

The second point is that we are a most important part of NATO, but we are not important enough to get the General Secretaryship, it seems. We have to realise that, even within NATO, we are beginning to be overshadowed by Germany. Within NATO, we need to concentrate more on interoperability. I was the first leader of the European Parliament delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in around 1989. At that time, we were talking about the need for interoperability. The fact of the matter was that you could not send a tank through Denmark without the permission of the Danish parliament—and the fact of the matter is that interoperability is still a challenge for NATO and one that we need to look at.

The other challenge is that we need to be more realistic about Article 5. We are fond of saying, “Oh, it’s an Article 5 commitment”, but all that Article 5 says is that an attack on one is an attack on all. It does not say what we should do if Russia decided to intervene in Estonia. It does not give Lisbon any guidance as to what it should do, apart from saying, “Oh dear, Russia has intervened in Estonia. What shall we do?” As far

as I can tell, we are not obliged under Article 5 to do anything at all, other than to note that an attack is an attack on us all. That needs looking at.

The point has been made on more than one occasion that the United States is yet again blowing hot and cold on its commitment in Europe. This has been the pattern for many years now. We must bear in mind that, in the end, Europe will have to defend itself. We cannot outsource defence for ever. In fact, we cannot outsource it for very much longer.

We hear lots of strong words about Ukraine, but we also need some realism. One day the fighting will stop—we do not know when, but it will. When it stops, Russia will still be in the same place geographically, it will be the same size and it will present the same challenges, and we have to come to terms with those challenges. We go on about Russian money rebuilding Ukraine, but the truth of the matter is that it is not going to happen. It has never happened—one country has never rebuilt another. It might be said that we rebuilt parts of Germany after the Second World War, but Germany did not rebuild anyone outside its borders for many years until it was rich again. We have got to be realistic: when the fighting stops, Ukraine will need a lot of help from the countries of the West that are now behind it.

As Ben Wallace said, the world is now more unstable and insecure, but I am not sure that that is not a predictable thing. What I would say is that we need to be tolerant and we need to look at building a new Helsinki and coming to terms with the reality of being a small but important nation contributing to the defence of our common home.

1.49 pm

Lord Mountevans (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Soames, on securing this debate and on so excellently setting the scene in his introductory remarks. I also declare my interest as an honorary captain in the Royal Naval Reserve.

I very much associate myself with most of what has been said by the other speakers, especially on the level of defence spending, the need for urgent action and the critical importance of reserves. I support the comments of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Richards, on the critical importance of a strong and growing economy.

Previous speakers have done an excellent job of highlighting the important contribution and needs of the armed services; I might add their value and importance in diplomacy. The Joint Expeditionary Force was an outstanding success, which played a part in the decision of Sweden and Finland to join NATO—a major development. Britain played a significant role here and in the AUKUS agreement with Australia and the US. Both were of great diplomatic value, demonstrating an outward-looking United Kingdom at a time when we had left the EU.

Our actions and clear thinking in support of Ukraine have gained us considerable admiration among close friends and others who are not so committed. This is Britain in an outward-facing role. Britain's support for open seas and the presence of the Royal Navy are important not only for Britain as a trading and maritime nation but for all trading nations.

More can be said about the contribution of the services to our national well-being beyond defence. We have not said a lot about their contribution to humanitarian aid in times of weather or health emergencies. Their skills and training are of benefit to wider society, as is their innovation in science and technology. I believe that more can be done to bring across expertise and knowledge gained in the military into civilian life and the wider economy.

We have heard about procurement mistakes, but mention has not been made of the export benefit that Britain gains from every delivered F35 jet, where 15% of equipment value accrues to the United Kingdom. The AUKUS project will be based on the British next-generation submarine. I also draw attention to the sale of the design of the Type 26 frigate being built in Australia and Canada, as well as the Type 32 being built in Poland.

In concluding, I want to make the case for a whole-of-society approach to defence and the support of our armed services. When I was coming up to my year as Lord Mayor of London, one of my predecessors, the late Sir Roger Gifford, told a reservist audience that defence is everyone's business. Of course he was right, and I have never forgotten his words. As we have heard, not all of society is properly conscious of our Armed Forces and their needs. Most of us here had parents who were in the war, and people had uncles, neighbours and so on who were in the services, so they were connected to the services and knew a great deal about them. This is not the case now, with our smaller services. What steps can the Government take to increase public understanding of the role and importance of the armed services?

1.52 pm

Lord Risby (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Soames for securing this most timely debate, deploying his immense experience and knowledge of defence matters. The refreshed integrated review and the 2023 defence Command Paper represent a concerted effort to target Britain's foreign policy where it is most able to have impact. The documents are forthright in acknowledging the changing nature of the rules-based international system and the myriad threats to it, but we need to step up British efforts to defend this system. However, it would have been inconceivable to have predicted the international environment as it exists today.

I will say just a few words about Ukraine, a country I have visited many times, including Crimea, in my capacity as the former chairman of the British Ukrainian Society. We are aware of the millions of Ukrainians who have sought refuge elsewhere, but let us remind ourselves of the huge internal displacement. Every week I get emails from Ukraine and, despite the economic situation, the splitting up of families and the atrocious Russian drone attacks, Ukrainians never, ever complain. Their stoicism and resilience are astonishing and very humbling for us all. The decision to begin the training associated with Operation Orbital in 2015 and what followed paid dividends, and the gratitude of Ukraine towards us is enormous. The leadership shown by this country, and the role of Ben Wallace, are universally acknowledged there.

[LORD RISBY]

President Putin has talked and written about Ukrainians and Russians being effectively one people and one country; this is absolutely not the view of Ukrainians. He argued that he invaded Ukraine because of a threat by NATO via Ukraine. Now, despite all the Russian threats, Sweden and Finland have abandoned their former neutrality; despite a hesitant initial response from some NATO countries, 22 of NATO's 31 members have increased defence spending; imports of Russian fossil fuels have been dramatically curtailed; and new defence and foreign policy structures have led to much more strategic convergence. But Putin's major miscalculation has been on the focus and generosity of the United States. It is not the first time that this country thousands of miles away has ridden to the rescue, and thank heavens this has happened again. Far from abandoning Europe, it would have been impossible without the US for Ukraine to have fought back so effectively. Our relationship with the United States today, in intelligence, security and defence matters, is hugely appreciated in Kyiv and must be retained.

Russia's grotesque war of aggression against Ukraine shows how developments in the Euro-Atlantic area can affect countries in the Indo-Pacific, which the 2021 integrated review tilt has now developed further. As Penny Wong, Australia's Foreign Minister, said at King's College in London earlier this year:

"In our modern, tightly-woven world, what happens in Europe reverberates in the Indo-Pacific. And what happens in the Indo-Pacific reverberates in Europe. No region—indeed, no country—is an island".

Our relationship with Australia has developed exponentially. Its defence strategic review of April this year is particularly focused on naval modernisation and long-range maritime strike forces, reflecting the aggressive activities of China in the region. The initial AUKUS partnership links us to Australia and the United States, reflecting a common analysis of the region's challenges but also offering greater longevity to our own shipbuilding industries. This new partnership reflects our shared values. We can be pleased that Australia is building important relationships with countries such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Just as European countries have re-established common defence objectives—for example, the UK, Japan and Italy's global combat air programme—so we see the same in Japan and Korea.

However the Ukraine war ends, Russia is likely to retain its sea and air capabilities essentially intact. The United Kingdom is one of its least favourite countries, and we remind ourselves that China does not share our view of international maritime law. Defence spending has at times in the past been seen as lacking electoral appeal. The last few years have been a dramatic wake-up call, to which we now absolutely have to respond.

1.58 pm

Lord Sterling of Plaistow (Con): My Lords, I think it splendid that my noble friend Lord Soames managed to get this debate. It is very interesting that three to four years ago I tried to get a major debate in this House, for one or two days, about defence. It is something that could be possible, with the way we work here, but has never happened. I discovered from chatting with

people in the other House that there is no method there whereby you can call for a debate in that format; there never has been, going right the way back through history. Some noble Lords will know much more about that than I did.

I feel very strongly about national service, possibly because I did it, in the Royal Air Force in Egypt in 1973. We had 87,000 of the finest of our troops based there in every conceivable form, but things have changed. I am a great believer in bringing back some form of national service. The reservist system in this country, in which I have been involved since 1991, is different; it is not a form of service in which you have full training. There is not the same number as we talked about before who have the time, in this modern day and age, to bring what we need to defend the country. But increasingly we need the brain power of those who can deal with hacking and areas of that nature, which can be the most dangerous things that affect the armed services, not just banks or others.

Supposing Ukraine had not happened, would we be having this debate? Would there be any talk at all about what to do about the armed services? A lot of the ideas we are thinking about are important because it is a dangerous world, but we also have the attitude that in no way whatever does anybody who is part of NATO want to put a single boot into the campaign in Ukraine. I totally agree with my noble friend Lord Risby's view: the United States is our finest ally. It picks up nearly 82% of the cost of NATO, which people forget. From the point of view of down under, we have to think about our relationships with all our Commonwealth countries; they are very important. In my company, where my predecessors served in the Battle of Trafalgar, we lost 186 ships and crews at sea in the last two wars. The people in that area are part of us. Is the idea that we should not go beyond the Atlantic area? After all, we have been protected for 50 or 60 years by our submarines, if you can remember what they do, which is a terrific background.

The private sector is a hugely important part of whatever we do for the defence of the realm, because it produces most of what we do in every way possible. But we must create wealth; if you do not have wealth, you do not have the money to spend. In the discussion we had on the last review, in which the noble Baroness also took part, we agreed that it was troubling that we have a debate such as this one, and talk about what must be done, and nothing happens. It takes ages for anybody to get anything done and report back on what is really happening, and I suggest that this has not really finished today.

Finally, on the money side, I believe in 5% and more because, with inflation, if we do not have at least 5% we are really going to be in a mess.

2.03 pm

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Like other noble Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Soames, for introducing this debate so brilliantly and, as so often, demonstrating how much we have in common across all parts of your Lordships' House when we speak on defence. So often from this Bench, I find that if there is

a Statement and I am following the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, I echo what he has said. Most of the time, we stand up and pay tribute to His Majesty's Armed Forces and the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, thanks us for doing so and does likewise.

Today, I think there is almost unanimity across the House, but, for once, the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, may not feel it is quite such a comfortable place to be. This is precisely because, across the House, while paying tribute to His Majesty's Armed Forces, there is a common theme where in many ways we are all echoing the outgoing—or rather, outgone—Secretary of State, Ben Wallace, in suggesting that there has been a hollowing out of His Majesty's Armed Forces. At the present time, the last thing that this country can afford to do is to hollow out our Armed Forces, because we are at a time of international turbulence. We have had a new integrated review refresh, and this defence Command Paper, precisely because the threats that were perceived in 2021 have been realised, and things have gone much further in Ukraine.

The danger for the Liberal Democrats, or indeed for any of the Front Benches, in winding up in a debate like this, is that by the time we get to the winding speeches, everything has been said but perhaps not everybody has said it. But on this occasion there are a couple of questions that I would like to raise that I do not think have been touched on in other speeches. I will then come back to the themes of defence spending, Armed Forces morale and the role of the Armed Forces in this country.

Looking at the opening ministerial words of the defence Command Paper of this year, I think there is very little with which we would disagree in what Ben Wallace and James Heapey said. They talked about Russia, but they also mentioned China, as the noble Lord, Lord Soames, did in his opening remarks. I wonder whether the Minister could tell the House a little bit more about what His Majesty's Government think in terms of relations with China and defence threats, in particular in light of the suggestions over the weekend that the MoD had been hacked? Could the Minister reassure the House about cybersecurity, which is, I think, a topic that has not really been explored today but is worth thinking about? If our own MoD is not secure, what message is that sending? Something about cybersecurity would be very welcome.

Beyond that, we heard the noble Lord, Lord Mountevans, suggest towards the end that “defence is everybody's business”. The noble Baroness, Lady Fraser, pointed out a problem of recent years: that, as the size of the Armed Forces has declined, fewer members of our society are used to having family members having experience of the Armed Forces. That means that it is very difficult to make the case for funding for the Armed Forces or for defence; it does not necessarily feature in debates. If you are out on a doorstep, you are unlikely to have people saying, “Please put more money into the Armed Forces”. You hear it sometimes, but if you are a campaigning politician running for office in the other place or for a local council, it is usually about the NHS or, on a local level, potholes, rather more than military capabilities. Yet, if we do not get those military capabilities right, there is nothing else that the Government can and should be doing.

So, from these Benches, I echo the requests for His Majesty's Government to pay proper attention to the MoD budget. It is a great loss to the Government and to the country that Ben Wallace, with his persistent concerns and demands about funding the Armed Forces and defence, has left office. Could the Minister enlighten the House on whether she believes that the new Secretary of State really does believe in 3% being spent on defence, because that would seem to be an important commitment?

Could she also say whether the Government would agree with the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Richards, and his important comments about the size of the economy? On these Benches, while we are committed to defence expenditure, we also believe that it is the size of the economy that matters, because 2% or 3% of a larger economy is rather more important. So what are His Majesty's Government thinking about in that regard?

We heard from the noble and gallant Lord, Craig of Radley, and the noble Lords, Lord Touhig and Lord Snape, among others, about the Continuous Attitude Survey. Our Armed Forces are vital to this country; we owe them not just a debt of gratitude but quality of accommodation. As we heard from many noble Lords, we need to ensure that the Armed Forces have appropriate accommodation and that their families are also looked after, because that is a vital part of keeping morale and ensuring retention. What are His Majesty's Government doing to ensure that morale and retention are improved?

On the question my noble friend Lord Wallace of Saltaire raised and the noble Lord, Lord Lancaster, discussed at some length, what are His Majesty's Government doing about Reserves? As well as a policy of increasing the number of Reserves, should we not think much more about an interplay between the regulars and the Reserves? That seems to be an area where we could ensure that the £10 million fighter pilot is not lost when he or she leaves the RAF. So is there is some flexibility and creativity in government thinking on those matters?

Finally, I was not expecting to speak about the nuclear deterrent, because it is a decision that has been made in terms of Trident replacement, but the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, and my noble friend Lady Miller both pointed out that there is question about the size of stockpiles. In the integrated review, His Majesty's Government talked about increasing the number of nuclear warheads. Have they had a chance to rethink that? The deterrent only needs to be a minimal deterrent; increasing the number of warheads does not necessarily seem to be the most effective way of using scarce resources. Would it not be better for us to think not about increasing the number of nuclear weapons but about ensuring that we have credibility in conventional weapons, so that we can keep our place and seat at the table, leading in NATO?

2.12 pm

Lord Coaker (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and have it the other way round from what we normally do—and what a privilege it is to take part in this debate.

[LORD COAKER]

It would be remiss of me not to start by conveying again to the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, the appreciation that His Majesty's Opposition have for the work that Ben Wallace did as Defence Secretary. It has been acclaimed by many across the Chamber, and we recognise him as someone who has done an excellent job. In other areas of politics, we sometimes criticise each other unnecessarily, but, on defence, where credit is due it should be given, and it is in the interests of our country that we have a Defence Secretary who does the job well. I hope that the Minister will pass that on.

In the same way, I hope that the new Defence Secretary does well in his post—notwithstanding the criticisms that can be made about the number of posts he has had. It is in all our interests to have a UK Defence Secretary who does a good job, and I hope that that works out for him, notwithstanding the other criticisms and challenges we may make.

What a brilliant speech it was from the noble Lord, Lord Soames, to start the debate. Sometimes in this House, people are moved by speeches that are made. We were moved today, and in a way that reminded us of the importance of what he was talking about in the heartfelt and sincere tribute he paid to our Armed Forces. I hope that our Armed Forces hear that and recognise the sincerity with which it was made. It informed our debate and set the tone, and it gave us all the opportunity to lay out what we think.

I think it is important to remind the House of some of the fundamentals of His Majesty's Opposition's defence policy. We fully support the Government's efforts in Ukraine and the need to tackle the Russian threat. The unity of purpose across this Chamber and across NATO has been really significant in standing with the Ukrainian people to resist Russian aggression. There must never be a scintilla of difference between us in that unity of purpose. Putin sorely underestimated the unity of NATO in standing up against Russian aggression and our resilience to be in it not just for the short term. As the former Defence Secretary, the Prime Minister and others have said, we will do whatever it takes to deliver that objective.

I remind noble Lords of the importance we give to NATO and our support for AUKUS and our other alliances. As the noble Lord, Lord Soames, reminded us, we are proud of our Armed Forces and want, hope and expect them to be treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve. The noble Lord, Lord Lancaster, pointed out the importance of our reserves, their families and veterans—I declare an interest as my son-in-law is an active reservist who has recently been on operations with His Majesty's Armed Forces in eastern Europe. His Majesty's Opposition also fully support the renewal of the independent nuclear deterrent.

This House is sometimes criticised, and people may have a view of what reform should or should not happen, but this debate has shown the quality of contributions and the experience brought to bear by many who have served in and led the Armed Forces. The experience of former Secretaries of State, former Ministers and others in this Chamber who still hold positions is really important. I look forward to seeing how the Minister will try to distil how some of that

information may inform government policy. It would be a shame for us to have a debate and just walk away from it saying: "That was very interesting, there were brilliant speeches". There have been informed speeches that seek to challenge the Government in a legitimate and positive way and ask: "Have the Government got this right? Is the way they are looking at the future right?"

The Government face numerous challenges and none of us wants them not to succeed, but are they right about the size of the Army? Can we really deliver what we want with the size of the Army we have? These are legitimate questions posed by the noble and gallant Lords, Lord Houghton, Lord Richards and Lord Walker, the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, and many others. My noble friends Lord West and Lord Browne, a former Defence Secretary, asked this not because they want the Government to fail but because, with all its various commitments, is that really the size of the Army we want today? Have we really got enough ships? Have we got the numbers of fighters we want, as the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, pointed out from his own experience? What about stockpiles and industrial strategy?

It is not only about the numbers but about recruitment and retention in our Armed Forces. Recently, I went to HMS "Raleigh" in the south-west—I think the noble Baroness, Lady Fraser, may have been on that visit. They could not recruit young people even with the opportunity to gain skills. It is so dispiriting. That is a real problem for us as a country and for our Armed Forces. It is not necessarily about size, but not being able to recruit young people is something that we need to look at.

I have one particular point and then a general comment. A number of noble Lords mentioned resources. There will be debate about whether you keep it at 2% of a growing economy or 2.5%, or leave it where it is, or whatever. I think the British public have been remarkable in the strength of support they have given to us for what has happened in Ukraine. It has cost them in their energy bills and in many other areas, but they have stood steadfast with the people of Ukraine because they understand what is at stake. They understand what needs to be done to win that battle, and that is really important. We cannot take that public support and confidence in what we do for granted.

Many of us here are well informed. We understand what is going on and understand the threats, and we believe that this should happen. However, if we argue for more resources to deal with it, that must be set against some of the other demands that will be made of the public budget and public resource. All of us need to understand and recognise that. The British people need to be told the truth about what it will cost to defend democracy, freedom and human rights. If they wish to do that, as I hope and believe they will, we need to argue it. That is one area that all of us should perhaps pay more attention to.

I have one other point to raise in my final minute. This country should be proud of the role it plays throughout the world. That is not in terms of being a military superpower, sending aircraft carriers here, there and everywhere all over the world. I believe that

the United Kingdom, with its aircraft carriers, ships and planes, through its alliances and as a permanent member of the UN, its membership of NATO and AUKUS, and the other things it can do, alongside its soft power and its defence attachés, can be a power for good in the world, standing up and operating with its allies. A battle and struggle are coming in a contested world between democracy and autocracy. This country has always been at the forefront of the fight for human rights, freedom and democracy, and it should once again be at the forefront of that. I hope that whoever is in government will take that forward, and I am sure they will.

2.21 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con): My Lords, if I may say, perhaps unusually, for a very fine debate, that was a very fine closing speech. We have had an enlivening and, perhaps more importantly, enlightening debate. As I have come to expect from a House that is abundant with former Ministers and former heads of our Armed Forces, there have been many fascinating points of illumination and, predictably, points of challenge. I will endeavour to respond to these in turn shortly.

First, however, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Soames on an impressive feat of foresight: namely—assuming his Mystic Meg demeanour—by arranging for this debate to coincide with some prominent arrivals and departures at the MoD. Many of your Lordships, led by my noble friend Lord Soames, have already paid generous homage to Ben Wallace. I thank my noble friend for his kind remarks about Ben as well as his kind remarks about my colleague James Heapey and me.

I will start by paying my own tribute to Ben Wallace. He and I first met when as rookie MSPs we stumbled across the threshold of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. I found him then to be a decent, principled, compassionate man, and my opinion remains the same today. He has been a steadfast colleague for the past four years, and he now bears the accolade of being the longest-serving Conservative Defence Secretary since my noble friend's grandfather Winston Churchill. As Secretary of State, Ben oversaw many things: the evacuations of Kabul and Sudan, the Armed Forces' response to Covid and the majestic "Queen Elizabeth" leaving these shores for a successful seven-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, his leadership gave us the Global Combat Air Programme, AUKUS—to which some of your Lordships referred—a new shipbuilding tsar and the *Defence and Security Industrial Strategy*. These legacies will all secure thousands of British jobs, not least for generations of young people. Also, as many of your Lordships acknowledged, there has been the immense contribution to Ukraine. As the Prime Minister said in his generous tribute, Ben "saw, before others did, what Vladimir Putin's true intentions in Ukraine were".

It is worth pausing briefly to reflect on the scale of the assistance his not just clear-sighted but far-sighted response generated. In the past 18 months, we have gifted a huge amount of equipment to Ukraine. We have sent logistics vehicles, search and rescue helicopters, helmets and metal detectors, not to mention all the

missiles, armoury and munitions that it needs in its struggle. We have led the international response, together with Canada, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Australia. We have trained more than 23,000 Ukrainians.

I particularly thank the Lord, Lord Coaker, for his warm recognition of that contribution by Ben Wallace and his affirmed alignment with the United Kingdom Government's approach. As Putin has continued his savage assault, the UK's support has never wavered, and that is testament to Ben Wallace's leadership. Our new Secretary of State for Defence has been absolutely clear that this steadfast support for Ukraine will continue for as long as it takes.

But Ben Wallace did something else: he oversaw the most radical review of defence policy since the end of the Cold War. In the process—I have seen this at first hand—he turned the MoD into a modern, proactive, forward-thinking and threat-led organisation. Next year, we will spend more than £50 billion on defence for the first time in our history, and this Government have committed—it is a laudable commitment, as noble Lords have noted—to increasing spending yet further over the longer term to 2.5% of GDP as we improve the fiscal position and grow our economy.

I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, for his helpful recognition of the economic and financial realities that confront the Government. My noble friend Lord Balfe reiterated them, and they were powerfully and eloquently affirmed by the noble Lord, Lord Coaker. We unfortunately do not live in a perfect world. If we did, the defence budget would be infinite and we would never cease to have things to spend money on, but in the real world things are very different. The Government have put their money where their mouth is, and the record is there. I would say to the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, that there is a healthy equipment budget for the Army, and, yes, we shall keep the number of CR3s under review.

The conclusions in the original Defence Command Paper remain right. Russia was and is the greatest threat to European security; the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, was quite correct to refer to that. China's rapid military modernisation and growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific and beyond pose an increasing challenge to us all. But Ben Wallace was clear that, as the threat moved from greater competition to active contests and accelerated volatility, defence must move with it. That is why we published the refreshed Defence Command Paper this July. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Houghton, that I would turn to that source more readily than to any other publication. It is certainly not an exercise in deception. My noble friend Lord Risby acknowledged the significance of that Command Paper refresh.

Not even the greatest champions of that paper, and I am one of them, would hail it as a sparkling work of engaging prose with dazzling announcements, but that is not its purpose. Instead, it is grounded, sensible and sober. In drawing on the experience of its ministerial team to look under the hood and fine-tune the engine, we are endeavouring to make the whole machine run better. The noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, wisely urged us to deal with the real world, and that is what this

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

Command Paper refresh seeks to do. A number of themes from the paper have a direct bearing on this debate, so let me just touch on some of the most salient.

First, the paper rightly acknowledged the contribution of our people. I want to spend a little time on that, because it was an aspect raised by many of your Lordships. My noble friend Lord Soames said that they are a unique asset and that that does not happen by accident, and I entirely agree. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, said that nothing else is anything without our people, and I absolutely agree with that, too. I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Snape, who has sadly had to withdraw because he is unwell. He mentioned women; women are a very important component of our Armed Forces.

I thank noble Lords for the warmth of their remarks about our people. The noble Lord, Lord Touhig, referred to the continuous attitude survey and what it indicated about morale. That was echoed by my noble friend Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie, who spoke particularly of accommodation. I reassure both noble Lords that we take these issues very seriously. There is an accommodation programme under way for new investment and reinvestment. We are seeing that delivering improvement, but my noble friend Lady Fraser is quite right. The circumstances that she described are unacceptable, and we are doing everything in our power to deliver improvement.

I assure my noble friend Lord Lancaster, for whom I have the greatest respect and whom I thank for his tremendous contribution on our reservists, that I see them as a vital component of our personnel and, in the case of the Army, with a particular relevance to future soldiers. I say to him and to others who are concerned about the future of our personnel that I believe that the Haythornthwaite review offers a very sensible and encouraging way forward, because it is building on resilience and flexibility. That is to help the work environment of the people we have and to make a more attractive career offer to those whom we need to recruit. My noble friend Lord Trenchard asked whether we will have 73,000 regulars. The answer is yes. We will have a whole force of more than 100,000 personnel in the Army—73,000 regulars and 30,100 reserves. I make clear that the Chief of the General Staff has not retired. He remains a much-valued colleague.

The Command Paper acknowledged all that I have been talking about, because our men and women are our greatest capability, the jewel in our defence crown. As I have indicated, our reforms give them greater career flexibility and, I hope, a more compelling and competitive incentive package.

The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Walker, gave a most captivating narrative of just what our personnel do and the diversity of activity that we ask of them. I felt that it was a little male-orientated, with the greatest respect, and observe that our women play a singularly important role in these endeavours as well.

The second thing that the DCP refresh does is strengthen our scientific and technological base. We are world leaders in specific areas, and DSTL is revered

globally. However, to continue outmatching our adversaries we need to stay ahead of the curve, leading the way not just in digital in data but in emerging scientific fields such as artificial intelligence and quantum robotics. We must also pull R&D breakthroughs into the front line. Quite often, sourcing a £100 solution may stop 100,000 threats in their tracks. That is the world that we live in.

The paper also sets up a more sustainable partnership and relationship with industry. The noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, rightly raised how we approach procurement. He is correct that it is folly to hold out for the 100%-perfect solution if the acceptable and workable 80% solution is there on the shelf. We are very much aware of that, and that is part of the new approach. However, because of the exponential pace of technological advance, we do not have time to wait. We need to upgrade kit rapidly, we need to respond to the relentless rhythms of the battlefield, and we need to ditch acquisition programmes that drag on for decades. We are now setting maximum delivery periods of five years for hardware and three years for digital programmes, which I am sure your Lordships will find refreshing. For the avoidance of doubt, our nuclear programme is not in contravention of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We support that treaty.

We are adopting a global campaigning approach where it is the character of the adversary and their threat, not the geographic focus, that will drive our enduring campaigns. We have established a global response force. Ready, integrated and lethal, it will better cohere forces from across land, sea and air, space and cyber to get in first in response to unpredictable events around the world. All these domains are critical, but it is the aggregate cohesion of them that packs the punch. I reassure noble Lords who are concerned about individual domains and services that we will keep a close eye on these separate components.

The Command Paper also recognises that, in an interconnected world, we are unlikely to act alone. Partnerships are critical to our security and prosperity. Many of your Lordships raised this. In future, we will be allied by design and national by exception. That is not some meaningless platitude. Frankly, it is sound pragmatism. Our support for NATO will remain ironclad, but we will continue to prioritise our core relationships. Deepening relationships with like-minded partners is extremely important. We have invested in our global defence network. We are improving its core communications and co-ordinating our defence attachés, who are a vital component of what we do globally within our intelligence functions. All of this keeps us safe and helps us contribute to global stability, but, very importantly, as my noble friend Lady Fraser observed, it brings benefit to the whole of the UK in myriad ways.

I am conscious of time, so I will deal with some of the particular points that have been raised. I do not promise to get through them all—I have a kind of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* here—but I will undertake to write if I cannot cover all the points I need to refer to.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, raised the important issue of China and I am very grateful to her for doing that because, to my surprise,

it did not feature prominently. The review refresh has defined China as an epoch-defining and systemic challenge; it has implications for almost every area of government policy and the everyday lives of British people, as many of your Lordships are not only aware but may have experienced. We will strengthen our national security protections, align and co-operate with partners, and engage where it is consistent with our interests. It is important to say that, where it is consistent with these interests, we will engage constructively with the Chinese Government, with business and with people, and co-operate on shared priorities, but wherever the Chinese Communist Party's actions and stated intent threaten our interests, we will take swift and robust action to protect ourselves and our interests.

The noble Baroness also raised the matter of MoD hacking. This is a very serious issue, which we of course take seriously. We have robust digital and cybersecurity safeguards, checks and barriers. The matter is under investigation. I do not know to what extent I am able to disclose further information, but I will make inquiries.

My noble friend Lord Soames, supported by my noble friend Lady Helic, raised the important issue of the western Balkans. I reassure the House that we remain committed to supporting regional security and stability, and to building resilience against malign influences. We continue to contribute to KFOR and the NATO headquarters. We have extended our contribution to KFOR—to the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance task unit, and to the strategic reserve force—until at least 2026. I reassure my noble friend Lady Helic that we strongly support the critical role that EUFOR continues to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we are exploring how to increase our bilateral presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and our co-ordination with the EU on the ground.

Very recently, the Bled Strategic Forum was held in Slovenia and attended by my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach. I have had a report back, and it seems that it proved a very useful forum, not just for the discussion of the particular items envisaged but as an important opportunity for genuine engagement among the member states. As your Lordships will be aware, Slovenia is now an important presence as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. I say to my noble friend Lady Helic that I understand that, within Europe, Slovenia wants to focus on Ukraine, the western Balkans and Cyprus, and thematic priorities include women, peace and security, and conflict prevention.

On the specific issue of training for the Ukrainian soldiers in relation to women in conflict and violence, I am going to ask the specific question to get more information. I shall write to my noble friend.

On procurement, a subject raised by a number of your Lordships, including the noble Lords, Lord West and Lord Lee of Trafford, we will respond to the Select Committee report that is under way. We dispute that defence procurement is broken; we say that it is not broken, and there is evidence that we are on target with a vast change in how we are dealing with procurement. The Type 26 programme has not had poor oversight. We have made, through decisions on E-7, savings of £720 million, and with the uplift of

£5 billion over the next two years we are continuing to ensure that we will deliver world-leading equipment to provide our people with the capabilities they need.

The important reforms made within the department in procurement, in addition to setting time limits for delivery of hard equipment at five years and digital programmes at three years, have vastly improved the professionalism of the senior responsible owners and programme directors. We are engaging much earlier in strategic conversations with industry and we are keeping an eye on exportability of whatever we decide we need.

The noble Lords, Lord Browne of Ladyton and Lord Snape, raised the matter of recruitment. The Army's recruiting partnering project continues to recruit in large numbers the talent we need, and it is a diverse talent, to maintain a competitive advantage. That is demonstrated by achieving between 98% and 100% of the recruitment target between 2019 and 2022, even during the pressures of the Covid pandemic.

My noble friend Lord Tugendhat raised the issue of stockpiles. I can confirm that contracts worth over £285 million have been placed since March 2023 in support of increasing and maintaining stockpile levels through investment with industry. My noble friend also raised the issue of the Baltic states. I can confirm that we are an important contributor to JEF, and I thank the noble Lord, Lord Mountevans, for noting that. We maintain our operational efficacy at all times.

I still have a great pile of notes, which no doubt would be of riveting interest if I had time to read them, but they are going to lead me into trouble with the Whips, so I think I had better look to bring my remarks to a close. This has been a genuinely interesting and stimulating debate. Noble Lords have asked whether this is something more than a courtesy opportunity for a discussion—yes, it is. We play close attention to the views expressed in this House, and these views will be used to inform and make us reflect on how we approach what we are doing within the MoD.

As our former Defence Secretary Ben Wallace understood, in a fraught world defence has never been more important. A number of your Lordships emphatically reaffirmed that. Our previous Defence Secretary accelerated the MoD to become a world-class organisation, and that is reflected by the recently published refreshed defence Command Paper, which provides a serious road map for our future and has had a good reception—people regard it as a very solid piece of work. My new Secretary of State wants to make sure that progress continues. I have had very constructive and cordial engagement with him. Our task in the MoD, led by our new Secretary of State, Grant Shapps, is quite simply to ensure that progress continues and that our magnificent Armed Forces continue to deliver for our nation.

2.43 pm

Lord Soames of Fletching (Con): My Lords, I think we can safely say that this House has taken note of the role of the Armed Forces and the UK's defence policy, in what has been an exceptional debate. We have heard some very informative and important speeches from many people whose interests and experience do not, in my view, get enough hearing in these defence debates.

[LORD SOAMES OF FLETCHING]

I would like to endorse my noble friend Lord Sterling's request that we should in the future, if we can, move defence debates so that they have a full day and all these important matters are able to be heard.

I was Minister of State for the Armed Forces from 1994 to 1997—by far the most marvellous time I ever spent, really. The argument about the balance between commitments and resources was rampant then, as I am sure all of us remember. The arguments were all very much the same and they remain the same, as do the forecasts: it was all very difficult—there were endless difficulties overseas and great instability—so we needed to cancel something. Actually, as the Minister said, the Ministry of Defence continues constantly to search for better ways of doing its business. Of course it does but, as she said, the truth is that, however much we spend, it will not be enough.

I thank everyone from all sides of the House for taking part in this fascinating and most rewarding debate, and the Minister for summing up.

Motion agreed.

Life Skills and Citizenship

Question for Short Debate

2.47 pm

Asked by Baroness Garden of Frogna

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure that life skills and citizenship are taught in primary and secondary schools.

Baroness Garden of Frogna (LD): My Lords, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this debate. I thank all who are taking part and apologise that they have only two minutes to speak. I also bring apologies from the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, that he is unavoidably unable to be with us on a topic where he has great expertise.

It is widely recognised that personal and social development are key aims of education at all levels. However, there are only minimal requirements on schools and funding pressures mean that these areas do not get the priority they deserve. DfE advice for education providers is that they should include

“other non-qualification activity to develop students' character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence, and support progression”.

This might include their ability to travel independently, to cook and eat healthily, to stay safe and to understand their all-important personal finances. This should be at the heart of education. Employers tend not to prioritise academic qualifications. They look for resilience, problem-solving, contributions to the community—life skills that impact on young people, our communities and our country.

I am currently on a committee chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Johnson, to look at education for 11 to 16 year-olds. As we take evidence, it is becoming increasingly clear that our current school priorities are not fit for purpose, whatever the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, may think. The EBacc and other programmes

are directed to academic achievements, with GCSE, A-level and university being the main drivers. Young people whose interests and talents lie in more practical directions are largely overlooked, their motivation declining with every year when “Hamlet” and calculus are deemed more important than engineering, catering, music, the arts—indeed, all forms of creativity. Preparation for adult life is given minimal attention.

There are some brilliant citizenship programmes where young people learn the key skills of working with others, communication and self-management. They are taught about democracy; the importance of voting; human, moral, legal and political rights and duties; tolerance and diversity; and the invaluable contributions that can be made by volunteers. They are advised of financial literacy to enable them to manage their future incomes; of course, this is particularly important in these times of hardship and so much more relevant than algebra. When did noble Lords last use quadratic equations? They were fun while they lasted—I thoroughly enjoyed them—but by golly were they transient. Pupils are pointed to sex and health education although citizenship is not the same as PSHE, important as that is. They learn about ways in which they can play their part in the community, such as caring for others, old and young, disabled or sick, who may need help in everyday life, and the satisfaction that comes from activities that earn them money but help the world to be a better place.

As chair of the cadet health check team, I am constantly encouraged by the achievements and life skills of cadets, helped immeasurably by the committed adult volunteers who change young lives. The coalition Government boosted the availability of cadets in state schools with the cadet expansion programme. The University of Northampton recently produced a report showing the immense value of cadet training to individuals and the community. Of course, the independent sector has long seen the immeasurable value of cadets and other uniformed youth organisations, which breed leadership skills. It is to the credit of the Government that they are continuing their support, particularly for disadvantaged young people in state schools to have opportunities to discover the immense variety of activities that will enhance their lives. They could lead to careers in the military but that is not the purpose of the cadets, whose main purpose is to challenge the young to achieve more than they thought possible and to face risks in controlled environments and under supervision. The glee and satisfaction on the faces of cadets who have faced fearsome challenges successfully is always wonderful to behold. The boost it gives to self-confidence and self-respect is invaluable.

At my remote girls' school, there was no mention of life skills or citizenship. I still remember the only lecture that touched on our futures, which was when a rather superior gentleman gazed at us and said, “Well, girls, most of you will get married so you won't need to bother with a career. A few will go to university so you have another three years to think about the future. For the rest of you, you could be a teacher, a secretary or a nurse”—end of careers lecture. How he spun that out for an hour, I still cannot remember, but what a bewildering choice for us all.

When I graduated from Oxford, happily engaged to a wonderful RAF pilot, I was again offered three options: teacher, secretary or unemployable. In time, I was grateful to her for being so brutally realistic. We moved 24 times in 30 years, never had much money, and my husband's frequent promotions always seemed to carry additional expensive social responsibilities. I did indeed drift into teaching and discovered the hard way that teaching skills are very different from academic ones. None of my pupils seemed interested in medieval French, which was a main contributor to my degree. I also found work as a clerical officer, a filing clerk and a copy typist—never, alas, as a secretary. There were also times when I was indeed unemployable: when having small children, when my husband's postings called for a full-time wife and when I could not persuade anybody to employ me. It is difficult to be a good citizen when you feel that you are no use to anyone.

When I was a “compulsory wife”, I was aware that we had no guidance or training to help in our roles, which were apparently essential to our husbands' success. I proposed training to include public speaking, chairing committees and comforting the bereaved. I was particularly concerned with welfare counselling in the hands of the untrained, as I had witnessed the harm that well-meaning but ignorant wives could do. There were other skills that we were just expected to have. Although there are no longer compulsory partners, I understand that this programme still exists at the Staff College for partners of senior military people. There was a touching male assumption that women just had relevant skills but, of course, that was always flawed. We all need help with life skills.

When we appeared settled in London, I found work with City & Guilds which was looking for graduates with teaching experience—heigh-ho, I covered two of those—and stayed with it for 20 years working on vocational qualifications, so full of life skills and good citizenship. Why do the Government not fully appreciate vocational or indeed technical or craft skills?

Like many women of my generation and older who were denied careers, I turned to volunteering with the CAB and SSAFA, welfare counselling and even as a reluctant organist in RAF chapels. My desire to contribute came more from my family than my education. My mother, who had a first-class degree from Cambridge, was denied graduation—it was not until 1948 that Cambridge allowed its women students to graduate—and she had to retire from the Civil Service as soon as she married, but she did constant good work with the church, marriage guidance and tutoring.

Of course, as I now know, we can all be good citizens in myriad ways and life skills accrue with experience. The importance of these subjects at primary school is vital, particularly for children who find academic school subjects taxing. If you are constantly near the bottom of the class, how important it is to learn the life skills of tolerance, kindness, curiosity, listening, hearing and speaking. Oracy is often overlooked in the curriculum, but being able to express oneself plays a key part in success in life.

For children whose home lives are limiting, discouraging or even dangerous, the importance of school to enable them to cope and thrive is crucial. Children who have caring responsibilities, and there

are more of them than we appreciate, are forced to learn life skills at too early an age. The school curriculum should be wide enough to encourage and support them.

We need a long, hard look at our education system. I hope our committee will have some pointers to a more relevant and productive time at school. All children have interests and skills which could be channelled into fulfilling lives. None should feel that the only way to be noticed or make a difference is to end up on the streets in gangs, empowered only by damage and destruction. We must move away from the academic snobbery which has limited employability and fulfilment for so many. We need engineers, builders, retailers, plumbers, hairdressers and artists.

Our creative industries are among the most productive in the country, yet music, drama and art have disappeared from many state schools. We hear that music hubs are to be reduced by 63%. Hubs have spent years establishing relationships and partnerships with schools and music establishments; there is a great danger that the restructure will leave many young musicians and would-be musicians bereft of music education.

It would revolutionise school for so many young people if their future needs, interests and talents were recognised. It would benefit the community and the country too if schools prioritised turning out good citizens—children who feel confident that they have the skills and knowledge to be useful. Will the Minister say what measures the Government are taking to ensure that life skills and citizenship are taught in all primary and secondary schools by qualified and committed teachers? The next generation deserves nothing less. I beg to move.

2.57 pm

Lord Farmer (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for obtaining this important debate and for such an excellent introductory speech. Schools do not single-handedly teach life skills and citizenship but only supplement what is taught and mainly caught in families. Of course, that can be far from ideal but, particularly in how sex and relationships education is taught, schools can contradict good values parents seek to instil in their children, which are often faith-based. Parents have found their children learning to be “sex positive” in their attitudes to relationships, which means

“stepping away from monogamy-based assumptions”.

Sex education used to be based on evidenced human biology; now it imposes gender and coercive liberal ideology, which is causing unnecessary confusion and stress. Will the Minister confirm when much-needed guidance in this area will be published by the Government?

Similarly, citizenship education that teaches critical race theory and other forms of cultural Marxism as fact is indoctrinating young people and denying them the skills to evaluate critically current strands of thought. The pervasiveness of these ideologies highlights that everyone needs a belief system to live by. By ignoring faith-based beliefs, schools are in fact promoting atheism—the belief that there is nothing. On what grounds do I say this? Teaching against committed family relationships contradicts tenets particularly those

[LORD FARMER]

of Christianity, which is predicated completely on our status as children of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Flimsy manmade ideologies that insist there is nothing of the divine beg the question that if there is nothing how come there is something? It is impossible to have something from nothing. All human beings face these existential questions, so what is the Government's attitude towards this de facto teaching of atheism in state schools?

2.59 pm

Lord Knight of Weymouth (Lab): My Lords, I start by reminding noble Lords of my education interests in the register, in particular as chair of the E-ACT multi-academy trust and as a director of Suklaa Ltd. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for how she opened the debate, although I say to the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, that I think I disagreed with pretty much everything that he said.

We must start by recognising the capacity limits in the time that children spend in classrooms. The curriculum is already overwhelming for teachers and learners and, if we are to add more to it, it has to be at the expense of something that we are willing to take away. The conundrum, however, is that children are leaving school ill prepared to prosper in a complex, dynamic world—surely, then, we should make more room for life skills and citizenship education. Some argue for adding it to PSHE, which is too often where citizenship is also taught now. When I was Schools Minister, I added financial literacy to the subject, and I welcome the inclusion of relationship and sex education, but that part of the timetable is now full.

I argue that the conundrum can be resolved through rebalancing the curriculum. Our “knowledge-rich” curriculum, the EBacc and the nature of Ofsted inspections combine to deliver a highly academic diet in primary and secondary schools. There is so much detailed content crammed in that, as the Institute of Physics told your Lordships’ Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee, there is no space to teach “the big ideas”. If we stripped out a lot of the minutiae of the curriculum, we could free teachers to be more relevant and engaging and include life skills and citizenship across the curriculum. This was the vision of my Private Member’s Bill in the last Session. I wanted a new aim for the national curriculum, instilling

“an ethos and ability to care for oneself, others and the natural environment, for present and future generations”.

More knowledge is not power; it is boring. But powerful knowledge is exciting and empowering. It must be relevant to the here and now, deliver life skills and make us successful sustainable citizens, and it will follow when we deliver a broader and more balanced curriculum.

3.02 pm

Lord Hampton (CB): My Lords, as a state secondary school teacher myself, I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, and thank her for this opportunity. The teaching of these subjects is part of a more fundamental discussion—as the noble Lord, Lord Knight, just said—about our whole curriculum.

The Skills Builder Partnership and Edge Foundation recently published a report that estimated that the lack of vital skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork and leadership, cost the UK economy £22 billion pounds last year. These skills, like the creative skills that contribute to the UK’s vital creative industry, are not passed on genetically or by osmosis; for most children, they are mainly learned at school. If we can enrich children with these skills, we can improve not only their life chances but the chances of those around them.

We should be teaching life skills and citizenship all day every day to our students as an embedded part of every subject, not as a separate subject. Problem-solving, both mental and practical, should have a much larger share of the curriculum. Teamwork, critical thinking and analysis, physical activity, manual dexterity and personal health and well-being would be far more useful than the rote learning that still clings to much of our national curriculum.

We should not be educating children so that they can go on to university; we should be educating children so that they can go into life. University should be a choice, not an inevitability and, whether they choose to go or not, our school leavers should be robust, practical, critical thinkers who are better prepared for a life as healthy, compassionate, ambitious, self-aware, resilient and employable citizens.

3.04 pm

Baroness Lawlor (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for securing this important debate, and I thank her and all noble Lords who preceded me. I, too, want young people to be educated to take their full place as citizens, educated in this country’s history, cultural heritage and traditions, which are characterised by its protection of freedoms—economic, political and, over time, religious—and its thriving voluntarism, with the state kept in its place by an informed democracy and the ballot box.

The question is: how can this best be achieved? Should—or, indeed, can—it be done by designating teachers and lesson time to potted citizenship classes, recruiting a cadre of teachers trained in what officials believe to be the fashionable subjects of citizenship today? At the very best, this can do little more than skim the surface but, at worst, it could end up undermining beliefs, traditions and aims that we all seek.

Today’s national curriculum already requires pupils in secondary schools to be taught specific citizenship programmes for 11 to 16 year-olds. For instance, GCSE headings cover such things as the development of the political system of democratic government; the role of citizens, Parliament and the monarch; the nature of the rules and laws of our justice system; voluntary bodies; and, of course, as has been mentioned, the management of finances, to mention but a few. Teaching these can best be achieved as a by-product of learning important subjects such as history, literature, classics, religion and mathematics, with teachers educated to degree level in their subjects. It is good, confident teachers who engage their pupils and can illustrate and make comparisons with today, imparting the skills needed and the aptitude to develop, whatever path in life is taken, be it professional or vocational.

I urge the Government to focus on recruiting able, academically qualified and committed teachers for all schools—primary as well as secondary—in the central subjects. This is the surest way to understand a culture characterised by parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and individual freedom.

3.07 pm

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): My Lords, I welcome today's debate, and I commend the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for introducing it in such a marvellous autobiographical way. In my short contribution, I will say something about the citizenship element of this debate. When you look around the world, you see that democracy is in a very fragile state. In many countries, including our closest allies, it is under real attack, if not violent attack. We have a great duty to help to preserve our democracy for the future, and our education system will be a key part of our success.

The broad issues of citizenship should start early on, at the primary school stage, in an appropriate way. Sometimes, I look up at the Gallery and see a group of primary school children—in fact, I can see one there now, watching our debate. It is a pleasure to see them. We have had several groups here since this debate started. I remember coming to this House when I was the age of some of the people here now, and I sat in the side gallery—it must have been about 1957 or 1958. I no longer remember the subject of the debate, and these children may not remember it either, but they will remember the sense of occasion and something of the experience.

I am not saying that citizenship education amounts solely to a visit to this House or another place, but it is an important part—and our education department does a wonderful job of bringing in students and young people to learn about this place. I am one of those Members who welcomes the chance to see schools and colleges, and I hope to do so more. I find that there is a great deal of interest in how things work and in democracy. When I last met a group of sixth-form students, they asked some pretty pertinent questions about this place.

My time is up. I sometimes feel that, in a debate like this, we should have the Minister's speech first, so we can better understand what is in the Government's mind. I look forward to hearing what she has to say. We cannot take anything for granted—and an active programme of citizenship can help to preserve the very democracy that we value so highly.

3.09 pm

Baroness Barker (LD): My Lords, I was lucky enough to be a member of the committee that looked at this issue, so ably chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots. In our report, *The Ties That Bind*, we found that citizenship education, which should be the first great opportunity for instilling our values and encouraging social cohesion, was often being subsumed into individual development. This is undoubtedly important, but it is not the same as learning about the political and social structure of the country, how it is governed, how laws are made and how they are enforced by an independent judiciary. It also does not offer an opportunity for practising civic engagement in schools,

local communities and beyond. We said then that the Government should reprioritise the subject by enabling a target for every secondary school in the country to have a dedicated, qualified teacher.

The Government's main instrument for delivering citizenship programmes is the National Citizen Service. I am a long-standing critic of this organisation. It was born with a huge endowment of political will from the Conservative Party, and it was given the status of a royal charter body, which it neither needed nor merited. It receives £63 million—the lion's share of government funding for youth services. Its website lists eight things that it does: everything from health and well-being to working together for success and employability. Deep down, in the middle of that list, is citizenship and British values. There is no detail about any of the work it does with schools, other than statistics about the number of people and places that have been engaged on short programmes that last for six weeks in the summer. It has a new chair and a new strategy for the next five years. Will the Minister agree that now is the time to have a proper comparative analysis of the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the National Citizen Service, as opposed to that of other organisations that have a long history of working in this field?

3.11 pm

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): My Lords, I was a member of the Select Committee that produced the report, *The Ties That Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*. It exposed major failings in the teaching of citizenship in schools. The Government's response did nothing to suggest that these failings were being addressed. The Liaison Committee's follow-up report, which was debated in April this year, again pointed out continuing failures in this area. All this is well set out in the excellent Library briefing.

The noble Lord, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, the chair of the original committee, much regrets that he is not able to be part of today's debate because of an operation. In April, he said that

“our follow-up report made a number of recommendations at paragraphs 72 to 77 about Ofsted's work. It is no exaggeration to say that Ofsted rejected the lot. It persistently mixes up citizenship education with PSHE—personal, social, health and economic education. In truth, they are completely different”.—*Official Report*, 17/4/23; col. GC 178.]

Is the Minister satisfied that Ofsted now distinguishes citizenship education from PSHE, or is the former still too often subsumed in the latter?

I will again raise two of the many concerns from the earlier reports. First, is a record now being kept of the number of trainee teachers in citizenship education? If not, why not? Secondly, are bursaries now available for those who want to teach the subject, as there are in other subjects where teachers are in short supply?

When we look around the world today, we see far too many oppressive dictatorships, military coups, managed democracies and elective autocracies. Of the 195 countries in the world, only 72 are democracies or flawed democracies. Democracy is a precious historical achievement, but it is fragile, as the noble Viscount just emphasised. There is no guarantee that it can survive. Young people should be taught why democracy

[LORD HARRIES OF PENTREGARTH]
matters and how to be a responsible citizen in democracy. Too often, at the moment, this is not being done at all, or only very inadequately.

3.14 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, the diocese which I am privileged to serve has 138 church schools in it and another group of independent schools with Christian foundations. I am glad to have the opportunity to visit them regularly—I have been in one already this morning. As I go round, I am heartened by the teaching I see already going on on citizenship and value-based education. I want to comment, though, on just a couple of things and to suggest that, while it is important that the Government are clear what they are doing, there is actually a vital role for families and a vital role in collaborating with other bodies that are seeking to do similar sort of work.

I want to comment on financial education. The Government recognise the importance of financial skills, but research indicates that children form their habits around money by about the age of seven, yet no time is allocated in primary school curricula for financial education: 5% of parents believe their children are leaving school with the adequate skills to manage their money. Though not part of the national curriculum, programmes such as LifeSavers, which the Church of England is working on, could be a huge help, teaching children about this important life skill. What steps are His Majesty's Government taking to work further with organisations providing financial education?

Then I shall say a very brief word on citizenship. In this era of increasing partisanship and division, our fundamental British principles of mutual respect and freedom of conscience are vital. Again, the Church of England's project, Living Well Together, aims to help young people and equip them to better understand different beliefs. Is the Minister aware of this project, and will His Majesty's Government give their support to it?

3.16 pm

Lord Sandhurst (Con): My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness for obtaining this debate and for her excellent introduction. My focus is on the vital life skill of financial awareness and the need to include financial education in primary schools. Children nowadays do not handle cash every day and learn to budget, as some of us here did in the past. As adults, they will have to manage rent, mortgages and household bills. They must be equipped for this, but the evidence is that too many school leavers are not. Children do not see cash going out of their physical pockets. In a cash economy, no cash means you cannot spend. But cash is no more.

As a child, I knew if I had the pennies to buy sweets. It was easy. A seven year-old faced with a bank or card statement has a much harder task. Children must therefore be taught. Skills must be embedded young. To manage money and to budget is a vital life skill. Without the skill, debt and disaster follow. We know that gambling is a growing problem among the young as well as adults. As the Centre for Social Justice has explained, money habits and behaviours

that will stick for life are formed by the age of seven, but two-thirds of primary schoolchildren receive no formal financial education. While financial education is now taught in secondary schools, since 2014, teachers say that too many children leave without an adequate grasp of finance, so it must start before then, in primary schools. We must act now and incorporate financial education in primary schools. I ask the Minister: if not, why not?

3.18 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for her very lively introduction to this debate and for the opportunity to repeat a key Green principle—that education should be for life, not just for exams or, indeed, just for jobs. That means we need far more stress on such skills as food growing, cooking, first aid and financial management. I am going to focus particularly on the area of citizenship and begin by questioning the division that occurs, with the idea that there are life skills and there is citizenship. I see being a good citizen as an essential life skill; the two things are not separate.

In the interests of being democratic, I am going to go to the report from the Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK, which was a participative democracy project run by the Constitution Unit of the University College London and Involve. One conclusion from that group of citizens was that good democracy requires an informed and active electorate, so that people understand politics, the consequences of their vote and how to hold the Government to account—boy, do we need a lot more of that.

We need to think about how people actually learn, and for this I am going to go way back in history to Confucius, who said:

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand”.

The thesis I would put in this short speech is that we need to see far more democracy in schools. We need to give pupils, like the young people who have just been in our Gallery, the chance to decide what happens in their schools, what they learn, how they study and how the school operates. It is by doing that democracy, starting from the younger stages, that we will truly prepare people to be citizens who, as we must have for our future, make politics what they do, not have done to them.

3.20 pm

Baroness Sater (Con): My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for securing this important debate. Life skills in schools are crucial in preparing our young people for a successful, rewarding and happy life, and I would like to declare my interest as vice-chair of the APPG on Financial Education for Young People.

Financial literacy is a vital life skill that gives our young people the ability to better navigate and manage their money and gives them better chances in life. Research by Cambridge University, published by the Money and Pensions Service, suggests that habits and attitudes towards money are formed around the age of seven. Further research in 2021 by the Centre for

Financial Capability has found only one in five primary-aged children receive any form of financial education. Recent research by Santander shows that over two-thirds, or 68%, of parents believe teaching children about money should start young and be on the primary-school curriculum, and nearly 70% of UK adults say better financial education would have increased their ability to manage their finances as the cost of living rises. If we can give our young people a really good start to their financial education in primary schools, it would help lay a solid foundation to further their knowledge in secondary schools, where it is a compulsory part of the curriculum.

Financial education is on the curriculum in primary schools in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, so why not put it on the curriculum in England? There are some really good examples of financial education provision in some of our primary schools, assisted by organisations like Young Enterprise, but it cannot be right that not all of our children have the same access and, as a result, potentially risk missing out on achieving higher earning potential, less chance of debt, more savings—and the list goes on. We cannot control what decisions young people will make later on in life, but we can make sure that every child leaves school with this important life skill. I believe beginning this journey in primary school is necessary and it should be added as a compulsory subject to the primary school curriculum.

3.22 pm

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB): My Lords, citizenship teaching can help develop an understanding and respect for the norms of society. But these norms are constantly changing; what was considered acceptable in one generation, can be seen as cruel and oppressive in another. The less than equal treatment of women was the accepted norm until quite recently. In the 1960s, it was perfectly okay to have adverts in shop windows for accommodation to let stipulating “No dogs, blacks or Irish”. In the early 1980s, it was lawful to stop a Sikh child going to school in a turban.

A Christian hymn reminds us,

“New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth”.

It is not only time, but also space that makes ancient good uncouth. In our shrinking, interdependent world of the 21st century, we cannot afford the old luxury of disparaging foreigners, including Scots and Welsh, as lesser beings, to strengthen our sense of unity and superiority. Nor should we look on other religions with traditional negativity. We are, as Sikhism teaches us, all members of one somewhat imperfect family. It is important that we move away from the old narrow view of identity and equip pupils to meet new challenges and responsibilities in a shrinking and interdependent world.

Does the Minister agree that citizenship teaching should not be based on past norms but on underlying ethical imperatives? The often-ignored ethical three Rs—right, wrong, and responsibility—must be taught and learnt in schools.

While the RE curriculum provides for the teaching of different religions as discrete entities, we should also recognise ethical commonalities between faiths,

which I believe should underpin the teaching of citizenship to help children meet the challenges of the world of tomorrow.

3.24 pm

Lord Shinkwin (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden of Frogna, for securing this timely debate. I say timely because it follows the recent publication of the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s report, *Progress on disability rights in the United Kingdom*. I pay tribute at this point to the commission’s excellent chair, the noble Baroness, Lady Falkner of Margravine, for producing this report in the face of some very unpleasant distractions. I am sure my noble friend the Minister will share my concern that, as the commission has noted,

“Although some positive steps have been taken to combat bullying, more needs to be done to tackle negative stereotypes or prejudice against disabled people”.

As I can sadly attest, bullying and discriminatory behaviours in relation to disability start at school, and that is where the sneers, the snide remarks or worse—which I still encounter—need to be nipped in the bud. This is central to nurturing a society in which equality and respect for the individual inform citizenship.

The plethora of DfE guidance on the importance of respecting each other as unique and equal, and on how stereotypes, including those based on disability, can cause damage, is all very welcome. But in closing, I ask my noble friend, in responding to the important question of the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, if she could also explain what plans her department has to evaluate the impact of its guidance in terms of the lived experience of school and bullying from the perspective of pupils like Archie? Archie features in the BBC’s excellent key stage two class clips film for PSHE, “Archie’s Story: cerebral palsy”, which I commend to my noble friend and indeed to all noble Lords.

3.27 pm

Lord Storey (LD): My Lords, I begin by thanking my noble friend Lady Garden for initiating this important debate, and for her valuable, witty and life-affirming contribution. I suppose we ought to start by understanding what we mean by life skills. The list of life skills varies depending on who you talk to and the circumstances and needs of society. There are various lists, but, for me, UNESCO and the World Health Organization hit the mark. They say that life skills are problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal and relationship skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions. I would add understanding, relating and engaging with people from different backgrounds and cultures to that list.

The next big question is how to develop and provide for these skills. It cannot just be a curriculum unit on decision-making; it must be a whole-school ethos which supports, develops, encourages and ensures that all its practices are aware of these issues. There must be related curriculum opportunities to reinforce this, but it is the ethos that the governors, head teacher, staff and parents develop which is so important. In early Ofsted inspections, a school’s ethos and values were

[LORD STOREY]

not things it would report on, because when it went into the school, it had an understanding of what the school's ethos was.

Finally, there are other skills children need so that they can be safe and protected. One example very close to my heart is that of life-saving water safety skills. I have a Private Member's Bill on that topic and, although I have run out of time now, I hope that the Minister will take it on board.

3.29 pm

Baroness Twycross (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the opportunity to speak today and thank the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, for initiating and introducing such an interesting debate.

Labour is committed, as part of our breaking down the barriers to opportunity mission, to building a broad school education that enables children to thrive and to develop life skills. Life skills should be taught throughout the curriculum. When I was chair of governors at a London academy, the pupils I met were most keen to access financial education. Citizenship education is vital. It is right that we ensure that children and young people understand the role of active citizenship—including an understanding of the role of government, Parliament and the justice system—and develop an interest in volunteering, responsible activity and activism, and critical thinking skills, as well as an understanding of how we should treat each other.

Part of that education must be the normalising of engagement with politicians and institutions, and I commend the work of the Parliament Education Centre, which opens up what we do. Many Peers also take part in the Learn with the Lords programme, which includes Peers being zoomed into classrooms all over the country, at both primary and secondary level, as well as speaking to children who are being home-schooled.

Even so, most children will not get the opportunity to come to Parliament or speak to politicians on a regular basis, so maintaining the teaching of citizenship in schools is also vital. Good teaching that makes politics and civic engagement interesting requires investment. The fall in specialist citizenship teacher numbers is regrettable. It would be useful for the Minister to tell us how the Government think that this issue, which is part of a wider issue, will impact citizenship and life skills. Can she also tell us when the Government next intend to make changes to the citizenship curriculum, and how they plan to embed better a range of life skills across the curriculum.

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Garden of Froggnal, on securing the debate and thank all noble Lords for their brief but pertinent and thoughtful contributions.

Like every noble Lord who has spoken today, we want pupils to leave school prepared for further study, work and other aspects of adult life. That is why every

state-funded school has a duty to offer a curriculum which is broad and balanced, which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and which prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. I thank the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans for his remarks on the important role of the family in all those aspects, alongside the school. I also thank him for raising awareness of the Living Well Together programme, which I have noted.

Subjects such as relationships, sex and health education and citizenship directly support the development of life skills. However, in the broad statutory framework, schools have considerable flexibility to organise the content and delivery of their curriculums. Schools can therefore reinforce personal development in other subjects, and through their whole-school policies and extracurricular enrichment offer, in a way that focuses on what their pupils need. From her experience in City and Guilds, the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, gave examples of subjects which were about one particular topic but gave skills in a number of other areas—that is exactly how the Government see the existing curriculum. That issue was also raised by the noble Lords, Lord Knight of Weymouth and Lord Hampton.

I turn to statutory relationships, sex and health education. This equips young people to manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive way. Teaching in secondary schools develops knowledge about respectful relationships, including online, importantly, and develops pupils' understanding of health and well-being, how to identify issues and where to seek help. The noble Lord, Lord Singh of Wimbledon, talked about the ethical principles that need to underpin some of these issues.

My noble friend Lord Farmer asked about the timing of the review of the RSHE curriculum. A public consultation is expected this autumn, with revised guidance being published in 2024, and an advisory panel is providing advice on what should be taught in RSHE and at what age. I can clarify for my noble friend that the Government firmly believe in the importance of religious education, which is why it remains compulsory for all state-funded schools at all key stages.

The citizenship curriculum is compulsory within the national curriculum at secondary school and prepares pupils to play a full and active part in society. It is organised around core content about democracy and the political system. The noble Viscount, Lord Stansgate, and my noble friend Lady Lawlor both raised this. It enables pupils to understand their statutory rights, civic duties and responsibilities and to become the active citizens that your Lordships have described in their speeches today.

Other essential life skills such as financial literacy and media literacy are specifically included in citizenship education. My noble friends Lady Sater and Lord Sandhurst were among noble Lords who focused on the importance of financial literacy. I hope that the House knows that the Government feel that financial literacy is extremely important. It is covered in the national curriculum, within the maths curriculum at key stages 1 to 4 and within citizenship at key stages 3

and 4. That covers the functions and uses of money, including personal budgeting and money management. It also includes—unfortunately—taxes, debt and financial risk, as well as financial products. In the primary citizenship curriculum, pupils learn about where money comes from, how it can be used and how to save for the future.

Noble Lords did not particularly dwell on the importance of PE and sport within the curriculum, but the Government believe that it should be a core part of what every good school offers to pupils. It can help develop some of the essential personal qualities, such as resilience and the ability to work well as a team, which a number of your Lordships raised. That is why we have committed over £600 million over the next two years to fund high-quality PE and school sport in primary schools, with an additional £57 million up to March 2025 to support more sport outside school hours.

Noble Lords also touched on the importance of cultural education in developing life skills. That is why we are investing £115 million in music and the arts up to 2025, in addition to core school budgets. We have published a new music education plan and we will publish a cultural education plan in 2023 to support arts and heritage, working with DCMS and Arts Council England.

The noble Baroness, Lady Garden, was critical of the EBacc. However, one of the key elements of it, which I know many of your Lordships would agree with, is its emphasis on the importance of learning a foreign language, given how that equips students with the tools and the mindset to connect with people from different backgrounds—which the noble Lord, Lord Storey, raised—and giving them an appreciation of cultures, customs and history around the world.

I simply do not recognise the description given by the noble Baroness, Lady Barker, of the National Citizen Service. It works very closely with and actively supports local grass-roots youth organisations, and in 2022 over 120,000 young people took part in its work, which is open to all 16 and 17 year-olds, with particular support available for the most disadvantaged. However, I would echo the recognition by the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, of the important work of our uniformed youth organisations.

The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, asked about Ofsted's assessment of citizenship and education. It looks at that in relation to both the quality of education and the school's support for a pupil's personal development, so at how a school prepares its pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in modern Britain, which many of your Lordships felt was extremely important.

I am left with some of the remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Knight—I apologise if I misquote him—about how we can tweak or change the curriculum in a way to be able to fit in some of the life skills which your Lordships have alluded to this afternoon. I do not think that anyone in the Government disagrees with many of the aspirations with regard to life skills that were raised in the House today; the question is how we deliver them. The noble Lord, Lord Storey, put it very well when he gave the UNESCO definition of life skills but asked, “How do we prepare for those skills?”.

Of course, the curriculum is an important part of that—although not the only part, as many of your Lordships recognised.

I point out to noble Lords who question our focus on a knowledge-rich curriculum that it is that curriculum which has delivered our extraordinarily successful creative industries and is delivering enormous innovation in technology, green skills and other areas. There are others in the House, including the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, who understand better than I do about how children learn, but my understanding is that without basic knowledge in fundamental subjects, children cannot access what the noble Lord, Lord Knight, described as the powerful knowledge. Therefore, I am concerned when I listen to the House suggest that we should take part of the knowledge-rich elements out of the curriculum and replace them with life skills, because we know what can happen if we do that. It is the deprived and disadvantaged students who will be told that they do not need to aspire or get academic qualifications, and that that is good enough for them. No one in this House wants to return to the soft bigotry of low expectations.

EU Programmes Statement

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (Viscount Camrose) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat a Statement made in the other place earlier today by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. The Statement is as follows:

“Mr Speaker, this is a momentous day for British science and technology as we have negotiated a great landmark deal, designed in the UK's best interest—a hard-fought-for deal that will allow the UK's world-leading scientists, researchers and businesses to participate with total confidence in both Horizon Europe and Copernicus. It gives the best and brightest of the UK's scientific community access to the world's largest research collaboration programme. It means that British scientists and businesses can co-operate with researchers not just in the EU but in Norway, New Zealand and Israel—expanding the reach and impact of British science and technology to every corner of the globe. With Korea and Canada looking to join these programmes in the future, we are opening the doors to further pioneering, international collaboration with a growing group of countries tomorrow.

We were always clear that we wanted to associate with Horizon, and that is why we had it in the trade and co-operation agreement. However, as honourable Members will know, we were not able to commence negotiations for over two years because the EU had linked it to the Northern Ireland protocol. It was the Prime Minister's Windsor Framework that broke the deadlock and allowed us to commence intense negotiations. We said all along that we would only accept a good deal, which is why we did not take the first deal that was offered to us. Instead, we pursued a bespoke agreement that delivers for British taxpayers, British researchers and British businesses.

[VISCOUNT CAMROSE]

We will not pay for a second of the time in which we were not members of the programme. Our deal also protects and benefits hard-working taxpayers through a new clawback mechanism. What is more, our scientists and researchers can benefit from Horizon today, meaning that they can immediately bid into the programme, with certainty over funding. All calls in the 2024 work programme, including those that open for bids this year, will be funded through our association to Horizon Europe, while the few remaining 2023 work programme calls will be funded by the UK guarantee, as they have been to date.

But this is not just about Horizon. We needed a bespoke deal that gave us access only to EU programmes that would benefit the UK. Having listened to voices from our world-leading fusion sector, we will not be joining the Euratom programme. Instead, we are investing an additional £650 million straight into cutting-edge fusion programmes over the same period—assisting our journey to become a science and technology superpower by 2030.

When I first started this job, I made it my number one priority to listen to the voices and views of the scientific and tech communities. They told me that almost two-thirds of research funded through Horizon's European Research Council grants leads to major scientific advances. I heard loud and clear how essential associating to Horizon was for the sector. I am delighted to now deliver on that. The deal we have negotiated has been warmly welcomed by the whole scientific community. It gives them the certainty they need to continue delivering long-term research and innovation that changes people's lives for the better and to be truly global in outlook. But Members do not need to take my word for it. Today's news has been supported by Universities UK, the Russell group, all four of our prestigious national academies, leading tech businesses including Airbus and Rolls-Royce, and countless more.

But this is not just about funding and support for universities and businesses. It is a deal that has real-world impact for people and communities throughout the UK. This deal is set to create and support thousands of new jobs as part of the next generation of research talent. The deal we have negotiated will allow the UK to continue playing a leading role on the international stage in solving the grand challenges of our time—from climate change and the race to net zero to finding cures for cancer, dementia and other life-threatening diseases.

Alongside this deal, the Government are proudly backing our science and tech communities. We have committed to invest £20 billion in R&D by the next financial year. That means more record funding on wider priorities, from harnessing the power of AI to improve our public services to tapping the potential of quantum computing. We will continue to strengthen our collaboration with countries beyond Europe, building on the success of the international science partnership fund we launched earlier this year to deliver truly global science with truly global benefits. Today, we take another giant leap in our mission to make Britain a science and tech superpower, and I am confident

that scientists and businesses are ready to seize the moment. The horizon could not be brighter for British science and technology”.

3.49 pm

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): My Lords, what a climbdown; what a humiliation. When it comes to Horizon Europe, the response is straightforward: “At last, what a relief”. The UK's absence from Horizon has been enormously damaging to our national interest. It has cost our research, business and academic communities dear, with the loss of billions in funding as well as jobs and expertise—the very things that the Minister was praising as coming along now.

The Government's failure to negotiate a continuation of the UK's Horizon membership ahead of Brexit saw British researchers frozen out of projects even before we had formally left the EU. A number of EU national researchers have since opted to leave the UK and its institutions for good, changing the nature and skillset of our research ecosystem—a brain drain. By rejoining, some of this damage may be undone, but that process is likely to take many years. Would the Minister like to estimate how long it may take?

Of course, we welcome the announcement, but the Government do not deserve congratulations or credit. The main reason that UK researchers and businesses have missed out on three years of funding and collaboration is successive Conservative Administrations' simple intransigence around the Northern Ireland protocol, and we all know that. Until a deal was done, nothing could happen with Horizon or anything else where we wanted to make progress with our friends and neighbours in the EU. Our rejoining Horizon was pitched as a quick and obvious follow-up to the Windsor Framework, yet it has taken more than half a year for the deal to be done and an announcement to be made. Colleagues across your Lordships' House have asked for updates time and time again, but Ministers, including the current one, have been unable to provide anything meaningful, holding the line that talks were “ongoing”. With such clear potential benefits for our economy, why has this not been more of a priority?

I have several questions for the Minister. I appreciate that he may not be able to answer them all today, but I think that noble Lords will want full answers before the House rises for the Conference Recess. Ministers say that they have secured improved financial terms, but this has not been backed up. No figures have been published and no evidence has been provided. Can the Minister confirm what the UK will pay over the remainder of the Horizon period? It is not much of a claim to say that we have made significant progress and savings simply by not being part of the programme. Does the amount that the UK pays truly represent an improved settlement vis-à-vis the terms offered earlier in the Brexit process, or will it merely be a case of the Government having saved during the period in which we were not members?

Has the department undertaken any analysis of the cost to the economy of not being in Horizon over the past few years? What was the lost-opportunity cost to our country? If so, will the Minister commit to publishing those figures? From a practical perspective, can the Minister tell us about the agreement's likely impact on

SMEs? Will UK SMEs be able to participate in industrial schemes under the Horizon banner? Will companies be able to hold intellectual property arising from programme projects or access other funds that may supplement those offered through participation in Horizon? These kinds of considerations are key to growing our economy—something that this Government has singularly failed to do for a prolonged period.

Once again, we welcome the good news, but today must be about more than headlines. It must act as a turning point. The sad story of the past few years has been a succession of Tory Administrations who have put political infighting ahead of the national interest. Time and money have been wasted on alternative schemes and our national reputation has taken another unnecessary hit. What will happen to the Government's Pioneer programme now that we are part of Horizon? How much did it cost to work that programme up and what will we have learned from the experience?

On a cheerful note, we must all gather together to welcome the announcement, wish UK funding applicants luck and hope that they will be able to gain from their collaboration with others. As we move towards the next election, we look forward to working to enhance our world-leading research base and to delivering the industrial strategy that so many important parts of our economy need and deserve. Horizon is a very important first step in that direction.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, I declare a strong interest. My son came back to the United Kingdom after 10 years working at American universities as a systems biologist—which is one of the Government's strategic priorities in science, as the Minister will know—on a Marie Curie European Union scheme. Had we not left the EU, he would have been applying for a European science council grant.

We on these Benches wholeheartedly welcome this agreement. We all need to be grateful to all those in the scientific community and the Government who did their best to maintain links and keep the negotiations going in spite of all the difficulties. I regret the overhyping of this agreement. Among the comments that have emerged from the scientific community, I note that from Professor Sir John Hardy from University College London, who says:

“Going back in is good. But irreversible damage has been done”

in the interval. Our colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Rees, said that there was an

“unconscionable delay in reaching agreement”.

Now that we have an agreement, the hard work has to begin. If we are to become anything like a scientific superpower within the next seven years, a great deal needs to be done. One of the things that the Government have to recognise now is that there is a contradiction between their approach to how foreign scientists working in this country are treated when they are here—and, even more so, their families—and the idea that we will continue to attract the most talented in the world.

Scientific research is dependent on an international network, and that has to be a two-way network. Far too much in this announcement suggests that it is wonderful for British scientists and will give us access

to foreign universities. We also want foreign scientists to work in British universities, but we have just had this announcement that the visa and health charges for foreign academics in this country and their wives, husbands and families will be increased from £15,000 to £25,000 in total over a five-year term. That is a severe disincentive. I heard about this 10 years ago when my son was first coming back, and some of his colleagues over there said that they would not come back to Britain because the way their American wives and families would be treated when they got here was so unwelcoming. That is a huge disincentive to Britain becoming a science superpower. It also contradicts government policy and suggests that the Home Office, the Department of Health and DSIT need to get their act together and sort this out.

The second thing we have to work on is pay. Academic pay for scientists in Britain has sunk by 25% in the last 10 to 15 years. The pay of a university lecturer running a laboratory in a British university is now lower than that of a post-doctoral researcher starting off in the United States—I speak with expertise on this. In an international market in which scientists are highly mobile, that is not attractive and will not get us anywhere like being a scientific superpower.

We on these Benches welcome this delayed decision. We regret that it is seen so much as a matter of what we get out of the hard bargain bilaterally and not as our joining a multilateral network in which there are multiple exchanges. There need to go on being multiple exchanges. We very much hope that DSIT will begin to learn the lessons of where we have made mistakes in recent years and on which we now need to improve.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank the noble Lords, Lord Bassam and Lord Wallace of Saltaire. Dealing first with the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, I think it is a stretch by anybody's imagination to describe this as a climbdown and a humiliation, albeit while welcoming it. In principle, three major advances in our standing have been made with the deal: first, the creation of the clawback mechanism to mitigate the risk that we spend more than we receive; secondly, the fact that we do not spend any money on any time or activities to which we do not have access or where we are not a member; and, thirdly, the ability to withdraw from Euratom or other areas of the programme from which we did not benefit.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): Can the Minister clarify in which year, during any of the time that we were part of Horizon, we ever needed to have a clawback arrangement? My understanding was that we were net beneficiaries from Horizon for the entirety of the programme.

Viscount Camrose (Con): As a number of noble Lords have observed in this debate and previously, the fact that we were not members of the Horizon programme was of great concern and probably did lasting damage to the UK's scientific community. One way to protect ourselves from further lasting damage was to create the clawback mechanism, to make sure that the money we put in would not exceed the money we took out.

[VISCOUNT CAMROSE]

It is worth reminding noble Lords that the United Kingdom did not decide to withdraw from Horizon association; the EU withdrew our association from us—making an association with the Northern Ireland protocol—which we appealed. It has always been our preference to be a member of the Horizon programme. The negotiations were hard fought and necessarily took a long time. We feel that they have given us a more than reasonable result. I do not enjoy the overhyping that the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, perhaps rightly points out, but on the other hand I think it a worthy cause for celebration that we are able to reassociate with the programme, which has been welcomed by the sector.

With respect to the Pioneer programme and the analysis of the opportunity cost, I argue that it would have been extremely reckless to have been negotiating with the EU and not had a programme. It would be like driving uninsured. I do not know the cost in terms of measuring the time of civil servants and other officials in creating the policy—I do not particularly know how to find out, but I am more than willing to try—but it was not a significant cost in that no actual investments were made beyond people's time and effort to perform the preparations. The opportunity cost of the time we have missed in Horizon is a calculation that has to be performed at the end of the Horizon period in 2027, so that we can understand overall, end to end, what was paid and what was the effect of missing out.

Finally, I remind the House that the United Kingdom is putting £20 billion a year into R&D by 2024-25. This is the greatest increase ever in any public spending review period and shows how seriously we take our goals of becoming a science and technology superpower.

I will take back the comments that the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, made on how visa charges and health charges will be very off-putting. I take that on board, as well as the comparison of academic pay for scientists. I will absolutely have a look at that.

4.04 pm

Baroness Lawlor (Con): My Lords, I should mention to my noble friend the Minister and your Lordships that I am not entirely sure that this is the best deal for UK science. Why do I say that? International co-operation in academic subjects is desirable, but Horizon is limited mainly to one continent, Europe, together with its member states and some of its fringe countries: Turkey, Tunisia, and the northern Mediterranean. Globally, the only power involved is New Zealand. Britain is a global leader in its research in science and the humanities. The opportunities of Brexit should have been taken to build a super league, globally, that is not restricted to one continent. I hope my noble friend will take this on board, and aim to develop much wider links globally and to take a lead in both humanities and science research.

I also suggest that Horizon is bureaucratic, and scientists who are in favour of it none the less regard it as cumbersome. Finally, there will be political strings attached. For example, Switzerland was a member of Horizon but was barred in 2014 over its immigration rules—

Lord Fox (LD): This should be a question, not a speech.

Baroness Lawlor (Con): I say to the Minister that there are strings attached. Will he reassure the House and ask the Government not to allow the pressure from the Windsor Framework to inhibit our freedom to pursue scientific research, and get a cast-iron guarantee that it will not be used politically against us?

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank my noble friend for the question. A statistic that I like to use, which maybe will give some reassurance that Horizon is not purely an EU-based body—I am sorry if it sounds rather arbitrary—is that our association with Horizon 2020 produced 237,000 collaborative links in 163 different countries, 28,000 of which were outside the EU, so although the EU is the largest body involved it does give global reach. I note also the proposed association of Korea and Canada in that light.

I cannot make a commitment as to whether forces adversarial to us could use our membership against us; it is not up to the British Government but to the Governments who choose to act in that way. However, we feel a renewed sense of partnership with our friends at the EU, particularly following the Windsor Framework. I hope that sets my noble friend's mind somewhat at rest with respect to the internationally reaching nature of Horizon.

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the Statement—how could I not? I have devoted most of my precious Parliamentary Questions to seeking that the UK rejoins Horizon. However, I do not want the House to be under any doubt about the damage that has been done by the delay, including the six months or more since the Windsor Framework. I very much echo the words of our colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Rees, in that respect. From the Statement, you would never guess the frustration of the science community in having to take part in endless meetings and discussions about a Pioneer plan B, when the objective all along for the science community was to rejoin Horizon Europe.

I have only a few moments to ask a question, so to be practical, how quickly are we going to be able to wrap this up? I spoke today to the Royal Society. It has no details at all as yet about the mechanisms that the Government are going to alert people to in order to enable them to apply—and we want people to apply as soon as possible. Visas have been mentioned, and this is a very important point: will they be special visas? As has been said already, we want the best and the brightest to come to Britain. These are important practical questions. In a way, it has never just been about the money; it is about the co-operation. I hope that this agreement will pave the way for improved relations between the UK and our European partners in other areas. I would very much welcome the Minister's comments upon it.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank the noble Lord for his question, and of course pay tribute to his relentless focus on holding us to account on making sure the Horizon deal went through. I am delighted that he at least welcomes that part of the news. On taking advantage

of Horizon, I am told that, as of right now, British researchers and institutions can bid for Horizon 2024 calls. The vast majority of open calls now are for 2024, and those are open and available for British institutions. There are some remaining 2023 calls, which are supported by the Horizon guarantee scheme, as before. We are able now to move quite fast. On the question on visas, I will have to write to him, as I do not have any information on that at present.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, this is, on the face of it, excellent news for the sciences. Now we need excellent news for education and those whose interests are in the arts and humanities as well as the sciences, through the Government renegotiating to rejoin Erasmus. If Turing was that great, Northern Ireland would not be as interested as it is in the access to Erasmus that Ireland is providing funding for. Turing might be better than nothing, but does the Minister not agree that better than nothing is a dispiriting ambition? We should rejoin Erasmus as soon as possible.

Viscount Camrose (Con): Better than nothing is indeed a dispiriting thing. Better than Erasmus is the assessment that the Government made when declining the opportunity, on negotiation of the TCA, to remain part of Erasmus and choosing instead to put in place the Turing scheme, on the grounds that it offers not only better outcomes but better value for money for British taxpayers.

Baroness Donaghy (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Viscount for accepting that this Statement is overblown. I think some of us are getting a bit fed up with these Statements that are claiming the earth when, really, it is a damage limitation exercise.

I chaired the EU Services Sub-Committee for two or three years, and we spent a lot of time discussing the importance of Horizon and Erasmus, and the importance of academic links and the mutuality of those links. I very much support what the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, said about that mutuality, and the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty, in his plea for Erasmus and getting the discussion back on a real basis.

The Statement says that this is

“why we did not take the first deal that was offered to us”.

At the time, we asked what that deal was. What were the details of the deal? Why did we not get the information to allow us to make the judgment about whether the Government had taken the correct decision? It is all very well putting these things in a Statement but all that does is trigger really poor memories about the fact that an unreasonable decision was taken. An unreasonable decision was also taken about Erasmus. Turing is very much a scaled-down and second-rate scheme. For it to be named after a genius is just disgraceful.

I should like to ask also about the so-called new clawback scheme. The old Horizon deal was the best clawback scheme in the business. We got a heck of a lot more money than we put in. You do not get better than that, so will the Minister say what clawback scheme could possibly be better?

Viscount Camrose (Con): First, as I was obliged to explain to the House at the time, I was unable to comment on ongoing negotiations for fear of prejudicing their outcome. The initial position of the EU was that we had to pay for the entirety of 2023, despite the fact that it was already March by the time this agreement was made, there were no mechanisms in the place for clawback, which I will come to in a moment, and it was all or nothing. I am pleased to say that thanks to the negotiations we have reached a deal that works for both sides.

On the clawback scheme, the preferred outcome is not to require a clawback. In common with every previous Horizon programme, we have gained more from the programme than we have put in, and we have every reason to believe that that will be the case, but there is always a risk that, because we are entering this particular Horizon programme late and many of the bids and activities will already have been allocated to different parties, we will not on this occasion be able to make as much money back for our institutions as we put in. In that instance, the clawback mechanism negotiated by our team mitigates that risk somewhat for any really significant disparity.

Lord Fox (LD): My Lords, without overegging the pudding, the whole point of Horizon is that there is international co-operation. There are issues with visas because we are going from the free movement of people to a visa-based system, so that is fundamental to how this works. However, my question is about Copernicus. We have not heard much today about that, so will the Minister tell your Lordships’ House where we are on that and how the deal reflects on that?

Viscount Camrose (Con): I will come back to the question of visas, and I take the point. I am pleased to say that we are also reassociating with Copernicus. It is such an important programme for the earth observation sector. Geospatial is in my portfolio as a Minister. I am a great believer in the value that it can bring. What particularly pleases and excites me about the association with Copernicus is access to the EU’s very comprehensive dataset that could help to kick-start our work and the work done in the EU. I am extremely positive about that.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB): My Lords, I apologise to the Minister for missing the opening sentences of his speech. By way of amends, I very much welcome this move. I know the Minister would agree with me that this is all about the exchange of ideas, which is crucial to development. Exactly the same argument could be made about the arts and musicians. The Minister said, very honestly, that lasting damage has been done as a result of this. I ask him to be good enough to take back to his colleagues that lasting damage is being done to music and the arts. Furthermore—this is the most extraordinary thing of all—the noble Lord, Lord Frost, who does not give way very easily, has admitted that the Government got these negotiations wrong. So, if the Government can put Horizon right, please will they put music, arts and touring right as well?

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank the noble Lord for the question. I recognise the issue, and although my ability to fix that is pretty limited, I will of course take that back to my colleagues.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, a number of noble Lords have referred to the stress, pressure and extra work that the scientific community has had to suffer through the years of see-sawing and uncertainty about what is happening with Horizon. On 10 and 11 July, I was with ABX, the Antibiotic Discovery Accelerator Network. On 10 July, the papers were reporting that we were about to sign Horizon, which I told them. Then, on 11 July, I had to say, “No, apparently Rishi Sunak has kiboshed it, so it’s off”. Can the Minister therefore say whether the Government will put in extra resources and support to ensure that the scientific community is in fact able to access this opportunity, which has finally arrived after so many years of waiting?

I have a second question. The Statement refers to what might be described as two of the “buzz” areas of science: fusion, on which we are not joining the EU—I will refrain from commenting on fusion—and artificial intelligence. Can the Minister tell me whether the Government will really focus on and support systems biology, an area of science that the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, referred to—the kind of work that produces agro-ecological methods of producing food and managing our landscapes—and the modern, non-reductive biological sciences, given that the EU is, in many areas, far ahead of us in this research and this practice?

Viscount Camrose (Con): To the noble Baroness’s first point, I am pleased to say that the EU has agreed jointly with us to help to publicise the new arrangements with the UK and our association and to make sure that all existing participants become rapidly aware of the opportunities for associating with UK institutions and working with us on programmes. I really welcome that as a positive step towards taking full advantage as quickly as possible. Engineering biology is one of the science and research priorities set out by DSIT and will indeed, therefore, remain very much part of our laser focus.

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): My Lords, as we have a few moments left, may I endorse all the comments made about the need to apply to the creative areas of music, dance and so on the same arguments that apply to Horizon Europe? I must also tell the Minister that during this exchange I have had a message from Cancer Research UK, which, as noble Lords may remember, has been very active in seeking to rejoin Horizon Europe, because it will make such a difference to the work done by these very important people in helping to solve one of the great diseases of our time.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I hope very much that Cancer Research UK, a body for which I have enormous respect, welcomes this news. I hope that the noble Viscount will pass on my very best wishes and that it is able to take full advantage of our new association.

Lord Liddle (Lab): I welcome this deal, despite the fact that it is very late and overblown. We are glad to have it. I was chair of Lancaster University for seven and a half years, and the Horizon programme was one driver of a great interchange of staff across the continent. Some 20% of our staff at Lancaster were EU citizens not from the UK. Does the Minister think that that degree of freedom of movement will still be allowed as a result of the reinstatement of Horizon?

Secondly, does the Minister accept that there is a real problem, as a result of Brexit, in the decline in students from EU countries? It makes our universities more dependent on recruiting students from potentially problematic parts of the world, such as China, with respect to the noble Baroness, Lady Lawlor, opposite.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank the noble Lord for that question. I slightly struggle on the subject of who is or is not allowed to work in our universities as a result of this. I am not aware that anything has changed there, but I have committed to come back to many noble Lords on visas and health charges. On the noble Lord’s other question, there is a whole world of researchers out there and it is incumbent on us to recognise our circumstances as a nation and engage globally with as broad a population as possible, recognising that good scientists are good scientists, wherever they happen to come from.

Nuclear Energy

Motion to Take Note

4.25 pm

Moved by Lord Howell of Guildford

That this House takes note of the role of nuclear energy in securing the future energy supply.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, I declare an indirect interest in that Mitsubishi Electric, which I advise, while not directly connected to nuclear power station building, is involved in the new transmission system that will be necessary to convey power from new nuclear sites and, even more so, in delivering greatly enlarged offshore wind power transmission flows from the north Atlantic via new coastal stations and a much more powerful and intelligent grid than anything we have today. Without that, of course, we will make no progress at all.

Our national policy on nuclear power development is at a crossroads. Some would say that it is at a Y fork in the road. One route would mean pushing ahead with the mega-nuclear giant projects as now at Hinkley Point C in Somerset and as planned at the so-called replica, where a repeat is planned of Hinkley C, at Sizewell C in Suffolk. Experience tells us—it certainly tells me—that that will take 10 or 15 years to complete. We have been at this point many times in the past 30 or 40 years.

The other route is to recognise that those giants have had their day and that instead we should concentrate resources and skills on smaller modular reactors, designed at a time of revolution in nuclear power technology worldwide—and which, it is claimed, can be built much more quickly and sooner and are much more attractive to private investors for that very reason. That is a very important point, to which I shall return.

There are also those who deny that there is any actual choice at all, and we just have to press ahead on all possible tracks. That is the sort of argument which says that there is a pipeline of new projects to replace our nuclear fleet, which we have allowed to shrink so drastically. It is embodied in the philosophy expressed by the American comedian and baseball player, Yogi Berra, when he said:

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it”.

This “let’s do it all” approach is to be driven forward now by the new Great British Nuclear office, just opened and announced, as an essential part of our affordable, all-electric economy by 2050. The goal is unambiguous and clear: we must build up our nuclear capacity to 24 gigawatts from its present 13 or 14, which is about to fall to 5 or 6 in a year or two’s time. Ministers predict that to be a quarter of the electric power that we will need by 2050—in other words, about 100 gigawatts—as all, or nearly all, fossil fuels are replaced.

When one considers that electric power today—roughly 60 gigawatts, of which 50% to 70% comes from renewables when the wind is blowing—represents less than one-fifth of total energy use in the UK, 200 gigawatts may be much nearer the mark than 100 gigawatts. This even takes into account all the wider hydrogen use that is clearly coming, much greater efficiency in energy use, better insulation and more interconnectors with our neighbours to balance the supply grid, such as the one from Morocco being mooted. This could bring as much as 10 gigawatts of solar power into the British grid—a reminder that there is no such thing as a purely homegrown energy system, as some officials in our Department for Energy seem to think. They are quite wrong.

This leaves open a large number of questions about the nuclear role. First, I gather that the start button on Sizewell C may very shortly be pressed by the new Secretary of State. We welcome her and wish her well in her very difficult new job. Before this button is pressed, may we have some up-to-date assessments of likely capital costs and completion dates for this Sizewell replica? Is the plan to continue with six more such gigawatt-generating plants, as various Prime Ministers have called for in the last decade, or to make this the last and move on to a new, cheaper and possibly less risky smaller design for the next phase?

Secondly, has account been taken of the EPR—the European pressurised water reactor design family of reactors, as developed by Électricité de France for Finland, France and China, and now for the UK? It has a most unfortunate history in construction timing, costs and reliable operation. The EPR at Olkiluoto in Finland has taken 20 years to complete and is many billions over budget. At Flamanville on the Cherbourg peninsula—which I have visited—they are running 11 years late. It is still not ready and is also €10 billion over budget. There was a much-vaunted, allegedly successful EPR model in Taishan in China, but there too a reactor had to be closed down because of fuel rod problems. Our own first EPR, at Hinkley Point, was originally supposed to be powering our ovens for Christmas turkeys by 2019. Now the forecast is for 2027 and it could easily slide to 2029. It is already £8 billion over budget—in today’s money the figure is

nearer £15 billion. France is said to be looking at a new, simpler design for further replacement of its ageing PWR fleet. They call it the EPR2 but it is different from and not a direct replica of what we are trying to build here. The other day, the former EDF chief told the French Assembly that the EPR is “too complicated, almost unbuildable”.

Then there is the central question of finance. The sums are eye-watering. The last estimate for Sizewell C—the only one we have at the moment—was £20 billion. From Hinkley and other previous experiences, we know it is bound to be much nearer £30 billion. The present hope is that a funding scheme which has already been used elsewhere can somehow be mobilised. It is called the regulated asset base, which in effect makes would-be consumers start paying their energy bills from the day the scheme is launched—years before a single kilowatt of electricity is produced. The Science and Technology Select Committee in the other place warned that this RAB system contained “significant uncertainties and downsides”. On the figures we have, the Government will still need to put in about £6 billion, over and above the £1 billion or so already publicly committed. We hope that Électricité de France may come up with the same amount. Some £100 million has already been set aside to buy out the Chinese interest in both Sizewell C and an all-new Chinese plant at Bradwell-on-Sea which was once promised as part of a deal with China in times gone past when relations were happier. We thought then that they should take a major role in our nuclear progress, which we do not think any longer.

Perhaps my noble friend would care to update these estimates and figures and tell us how matters are going with the Chinese, who of course remain financially heavily involved in Hinkley Point C. Can we have the latest view on the state of play there, please?

What of the other nuclear power way forward, the other branch in the road towards much smaller units and new technology? I do not accuse, and no one could accuse, the Government of neglecting interest in the SMR possibilities, but mere interest is not really the question. The question is whether smaller and newer reactors should be not just an interest but the absolute spearhead UK priority, as other countries are making it, or whether the giant EPR replica, which remains the centrepiece of British nuclear policy, continues to be there, as appears to be the situation. Japan, America, Russia, France, China, South Korea, Canada, Germany, Argentina, Australia and Finland are a few of the countries giving priority attention to these new designs.

Most of the SMR projects under way are geared to operational readiness in the early 2030s or before, using existing or disused nuclear sites for sets of four or six, producing green, low-carbon electric power on the same scale as the old big ones. Here, Great British Nuclear is running a competition that is said to favour three SMR types: GE Hitachi, with its boiling water BWRX-300 megawatt design, which it says will be completed—I am not sure what that word really means—by 2028; our own Rolls-Royce, with its years of marine nuclear engine experience, which has linked up with US NuScale and also has Japanese

[LORD HOWELL OF GUILDFORD]

backers; and Holtec, which I think is the third favourite. All these are ready to deliver before the end of this decade.

There is one oddity here that I would greatly value the Minister's comment on. What about firms that do not need taxpayers' money and say they are already fully funded and ready to produce and sell into the British system? For example, I was visited the other day by a firm called Newcleo—I have no interest in or connection with it—which explained that it and several other similar firms have zero-waste small machines. They are zero waste because they use old plutonium waste from older reactors as their fuel, and could be ready by 2030. It has been excluded from the competition and is not getting any of the papers. Why? Matters seem to be very much upside down.

Is there not a major choice, after all, between smaller, sooner, around 2030, and larger, later, around 2036 to 2038 at best—and between mainly private finance and billions more from the state, which mostly means from taxpayers and hapless consumers who already face huge increases in their electricity bills? Should we not instead face the reality that smaller nuclear power plants, ready much sooner, offer far the best hope in our NZ ambitions, based on new technology, on streamlined approval procedures, which are certainly needed, and, above all, primarily on private finance? That is the key advantage and the sort of advantage that would bring in pension funds and sovereign wealth funds. With sets of SMRs built off-site and ferried in, this would also avoid all the local chaos and disruption of a prolonged 10 to 12-year construction site, not forgetting the long-term decommissioning problems and costs that these mammoths necessitate.

To me the priority is obvious. Further ahead, we know, lies fusion, but it will not be ready for 2050. Frankly, it is not on the nuclear mega-dreams of the past, which took decades to build and are still bulging with growing risks, that we will depend for our clean, reliable, low-carbon electricity supply. Size no longer wins in the digital age. This is an immense subject involving enormous sums of money, and there are those in this House with far more expertise than I about many of its different aspects. My own view, putting all these aspects together, is based simply on 40 years or more of experience in grappling with the nuclear power issue. We now have the chance, for once, to get it right and be a little ahead of the curve. I beg to move.

4.39 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Howell, for introducing today's debate on this very important subject. I am in no doubt that provision of a base electrical load using nuclear power is crucial for our nation, not least because of the vast increase in electrical requirement as the next decades unfold, as has been mentioned. I do not think the general public realise how huge that increase in demand will become.

Nuclear power is at present the only guaranteed carbon-neutral power source that can operate day and night, whatever the weather. I think everyone is aware

of that, but it is important to remind ourselves. Perhaps in the future tidal might be a similar thing and able to do that, but it has not been working well and still has a long way to go. Concern is often rightly expressed about disposal of the small amounts of radioactive waste produced by power stations. Suffice it to say that work continues on the issue of disposal of the small amounts of nuclear waste using the geological disposal facility. As I understand it, it is progressing but needs to be hastened. I ask the Minister to give us an update of where we have got to on ensuring that disposal capability.

The provision of a secure baseload of green electricity is of national importance. The work to achieve it should be seen as such, and in a similar way to the national deterrent programme—the continuous at-sea deterrence—it should become a national endeavour involving all departments of state, because they all have some interest in it. Looking at these future issues, expenditure on nuclear power seems far more important than something like HS2, for example, and the Government need to bite the bullet and expedite work on it.

How our nation, which at one stage led the world in civil nuclear power, is now reliant on Chinese, Japanese, French and American expertise is a national disgrace. I will not go into that now, but it is appalling when you think that we led the world. This needs to be turned around and we need to generate the scientists, engineers and designers to ensure that we are never again in this position.

As regards large power stations, I do not completely see eye to eye with the noble Lord, Lord Howell. I believe we need three—Hinkley Point C, Sizewell C and probably Bradwell B—online as quickly as humanly possible. It is all very well to say they take a long time. Yes, they do, but for the last 30 years we have been saying that; if we had done something then, we would have them operating now, so we should move ahead with those. However—and this is where I have to take a new line, down the middle—we should also embark on a major programme of small modular reactors.

One of the benefits of large power stations is that the national grid power line infrastructure is already in place on these sites. This is not the case with new offshore wind farms and other energy options. Other things we need to look at, but not as urgently as the small modular reactors, are the advanced modular reactors that can produce hydrogen and so on. There is considerable scope there for the future.

As the noble Lord, Lord Howell, said, Rolls-Royce has been producing nuclear reactors for Royal Navy submarines since the late 1950s when the first one was built. That expertise is highly relevant to production of SMRs. It would be extremely unfortunate, in terms of resilience, for those used in this country to be designed and built overseas, not least because of the whole issue of having scientists, engineers and people capable of doing all these things. To see it going to someone other than Rolls-Royce would be extraordinary. As an aside, people talk about fusion; although this is attractive, I think it is a very long way off.

The complications of having Chinese involvement in what is a crucial part of our critical national infrastructure has to be unravelled. It should never

have got to the position it is in, and no doubt there will be huge problems, particularly as regards Bradwell B power station, which I believe may have to be of a completely different design in future.

With the right leadership, political direction and public/private partnership, there is still just time to provide the civil nuclear power our nation needs. There just needs to be the absolute focus to achieve that. If noble Lords think back, we did a similar thing when we opened up North Sea oil and gas in the late 1970s and 1980s; think of the huge national benefit that came out of that. I believe there is no time for delay.

4.44 pm

Lord Ravensdale (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Howell, on raising this debate, and on the penetrating way in which he introduced it. I declare my interest as a project director working for Atkins in the nuclear industry. I am also a co-chair of Legislators for Nuclear and chair of Midlands Nuclear. The Sizewell B nuclear plant, which the noble Lord secured when he was Energy Secretary, has now been operating for almost 30 years. In the industry we are now working on a potential life extension to 2055, which will take the life of the plant up to 60 years. This really shows what an incredible asset nuclear reactors are for the country.

We have seen great progress with policy in recent years, with the 24 gigawatt commitment from the Government and the formation of GBN. We are now into the really difficult part: delivery. There is still ferocious debate about the future energy system and the right mix of technologies to best balance the energy trilemma of security, sustainability and economy, with the economics of nuclear coming under particular focus. What is really needed to start with is a more sensible discourse around costs. Across the media and in debates here and in another place, we regularly see the view put across that renewables are cheap and everything else is expensive, which is somewhat simplistic.

Perhaps one way of cutting through this debate is a simple thought experiment, where we have a grid that is reliant solely on renewables for generation—which is certainly technically feasible. Those renewables may be cheap in terms of cost at the generator, but how do we manage intermittency? The consensus of studies done to date points towards the necessity of long-duration energy storage: probably hydrogen stored in salt caverns if we are going for a low-carbon option. The scale of that storage requirement would be absolutely enormous—up to 100 terawatt hours. To put that into perspective, the amount of energy that would have to be stored is considerably more than that released by the largest thermonuclear weapon exploded to date. The engineering challenges and technical risk in constructing such a system, using technology that has not yet been demonstrated at scale, would be extremely challenging. The cost per megawatt hour of that system would be far more than the levelised cost of electricity figures we routinely see quoted for renewable electricity.

So the picture is much more complex than simply comparing costs at the generator. We live in a radically uncertain world and we cannot rely on modelling estimates of the costs of unproven technologies. We should be pursuing a broad range of proven technologies,

including nuclear and renewables, rather than putting all our eggs in one basket. Critically, we should focus on system costs rather than costs at the generator. I hope that is something we can all agree on.

Continuing the trilemma theme, energy security is critical here. We are well positioned in the UK in that we have the expertise and facilities for the complete nuclear fuel cycle following the importation of uranium: conversion, enrichment and fabrication of the fuel itself. However, we know that Russia dominates aspects of this cycle. For example, it has around 45% of global enrichment capacity. To ensure that fuel supplies are secure, drawing on lessons from the war in Ukraine, the Government should consider legislating to mandate that all fuel used in the UK is from western sources within a defined time period. Could the Minister say in his summing-up what consideration the Government have given to legislating in the area of our nuclear fuel supply?

I also hope we can also move to start seeing the stock of plutonium at Sellafield as an asset rather than a liability. There is an intriguing possibility here, in addition to recycling that store into nuclear fuel. Within that stockpile are tonne quantities of an isotope called americium 241, which could be used as a fuel source for nuclear batteries of the type that power the Mars Curiosity rover and the Voyager probe. To date, these have been fuelled with an isotope of plutonium that is extremely costly to manufacture and made only in the United States and Russia.

Americium-powered nuclear batteries could open up a whole new industry in the UK and create thousands of jobs. The National Nuclear Laboratory is currently planning a facility to extract kilogram quantities per year, but a strategy from the Government is required on how we seize the economic opportunity here. And it is not just the economic opportunity; it demonstrates the wider value that nuclear brings beyond power generation into things such as medical isotopes, and we need to get the public on board. Can the Minister say what plans there are to progress with a strategy for seizing this unique opportunity for the UK?

On how we actually deliver nuclear, I will say something about our supply chain development. Rightly, there has been a lot of focus recently on our skills base in delivering the aspirations of the Government, but that needs to be matched by investment in our supply chain. The successful Fit For Nuclear programme, run by the Nuclear AMRC, which is part of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult, provides a good starting point. Since 2013 the programme and its predecessor have helped UK companies win over £2.5 billion of new contracts, has created or safeguarded over 9,700 jobs, and has secured almost £100 million in private sector investment. It is important that we build on that and put in place the funding to address bottlenecks, invest in shared testing and demonstration facilities and develop the tools needed to provide the integrated supply chain planning capability that we need as a country to support nuclear new build. If we fail to do that, the opportunity to deliver long-term UK economic benefit will be lost; we risk driving up costs and exposing ourselves to global markets and international supply chains. Can the Minister confirm that the

[LORD RAVENSDALE]

Government will urgently provide the funding needed to support the development of a UK nuclear supply chain capability and seize the resulting opportunities for UK industry?

Finally, I will speak briefly about planning. There is a real need to increase the speed of nuclear projects going through the planning system, particularly if we are to increase radically the speed of delivery of nuclear. For example, the environmental statement for Hinkley Point C ran to 31,000 pages, and that for Sizewell C to 44,000 pages. Those are just two examples, but, clearly, we will not deliver new nuclear quickly if we do not have some fundamental reforms to the planning system and how large net-zero projects are progressed. That is something I am looking at for smaller projects within the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. Can the Minister say what the Government are doing about reforms to the planning system for large nuclear?

4.52 pm

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): My Lords, it is always a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, many of whose comments I thoroughly endorse. I am particularly grateful to my noble friend Lord Howell for securing this timely and important debate and for introducing it in his usual thoughtful and well-informed way. I draw attention to my interests in the register, notably my role as an independent consultant to Terrestrial Energy, a Canadian technology firm developing advanced nuclear technologies. I, too, am a member of Legislators for Nuclear.

It has been frustrating to read the recent extensive criticism of the Government's work to cut emissions to reach our net-zero targets. The expressed view that commitment to our green policies is waning is a false narrative. In all the media chatter about green levies on energy bills, heat pumps and targets on zero-emission vehicles, many seem to have forgotten that one technology in particular will do most of the heavy lifting—the one the Government can now be seen to be standing behind fully and completely, namely nuclear power.

The recent establishment of Great British Nuclear is a critical start on this pathway; it will be instrumental in both meeting our net-zero targets and reducing our dependence on energy imports. It also heralds a strong commitment to establish a supply chain that can be exported worldwide—and doing so in areas of the UK that desperately need levelling up: for example, north-west Wales. To continue the point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, save for the lack of a robust uranium supply chain, the UK could be completely self-sufficient throughout the nuclear lifecycle.

On nuclear fuels, the UK has manufactured fuels for reactors for decades, ensuring the long-term operation of our current fleet. Urenco and Westinghouse are now investing in new skills and infrastructure to manufacture a range of higher-enriched fuels for a future reactor fleet at Capenhurst and Springfields in the north-west, and the National Nuclear Laboratory continues to develop advanced fuels to support our future reactor fleets.

The recent announcement that the Government are planning to award funding as part of the nuclear fuel fund for advanced nuclear fuel processing facilities is

welcome. We may soon be able to regard that store of nuclear waste at Sellafield as an asset—a potential fuel source for some of the newer Generation IV nuclear technologies, as well as batteries. Projections suggest that, by 2050, around half of our final energy use will be from electricity. This itself represents a fourfold increase in production compared to today, which is why the Government have set such ambitious and ground-breaking targets for nuclear, but I question whether it is enough.

A secure future electricity supply is only part of the story. While nuclear power can be a major source of reliable baseload low-carbon power for an electrified future, it can also be a low-carbon energy source to assist with hydrogen production for use in many sectors, particularly those where decarbonisation is required but where it is difficult to do so because of the lack of alternatives to fossil fuels. Sectors such as aviation and shipping, and industries such as steel-making and agriculture, drive our economy, and their successful decarbonisation is not only fundamental to our continued economic success but, unless we are successful in doing it, we will fail to meet our legal obligation to achieve net zero by 2050.

Just as in electricity production, nuclear-generated industrial heat can play a pivotal role in the production of a whole range of other energy products, including sustainable aviation fuel, hydrogen and ammonia, and in the UK we are making this possible. When we talk about ensuring a secure energy supply, we need also to be thinking about low-carbon fuels which, when produced by nuclear heat and electricity, can enable us to continue our increasingly energy-intensive lives in a future-proofed and sustainable way. Some of these fuels are also direct replacements for current carbon-intensive versions, requiring little or no costly and time-consuming infrastructure upgrades.

Under this Government, nuclear has been included right across the board to support decarbonisation in many hard to abate sectors. This includes the publications we have all seen such as the hydrogen strategy, the sustainable aviation fuel mandate, the net-zero innovation framework, and the heat and buildings strategy—the list goes on. All include consideration of the viable role that nuclear can play in achieving net zero across all areas of our energy system, far beyond electricity.

Nuclear energy can provide the direct-process heat to decarbonise our industrial clusters, responsible for 16% of our greenhouse gas emissions—that is, if we can also unlock opportunities for siting small modular reactors close to those clusters. That is where the planning situation has to be considered. The heat from nuclear reactors can deliver low-carbon fuels, such as sustainable aviation fuel. Aviation is one sector that is extremely difficult to decarbonise. However, with nuclear energy as the primary energy source, the UK can produce mass-scale sustainable aviation fuel—SAF—for net-zero flights. Current engines can already run on SAF-mixed fuels; our challenge is to make enough to decarbonise the aviation industry.

The Department for Transport recognises that nuclear energy produces a particular type of SAF, known as power-to-liquid, which combines water and air through a chemical process to produce aviation fuel. This is

predicted to fuel up to 45% of all aviation by 2050, yet today the amount we produce is next to zero. The opportunity for the UK to capitalise on this market through the application of nuclear energy is immense. If we start now, this can be a reality as early as 2035, raising the ceiling on SAF production, delivering on government SAF targets, creating well-paid UK clean energy jobs, driving exports and positioning the UK as a world leader.

Nuclear technology can also decarbonise other methods of transport and industry by producing hydrogen. Hydrogen is often touted as the golden solution to our climate change problems; it is probably the most talked about solution beyond electrification. Not in itself a source of energy, like electricity it needs to be manufactured through a production process driven by energy, and we need huge amounts of it. Every day in the news we see progress made in the decarbonisation of sectors by developing point-of-use technologies, hydrogen buses, trains, cars and so on. However, to achieve all this requires the production of staggering amounts of hydrogen—far more than renewables and electrolysis alone can provide. The Climate Change Committee said that to achieve net zero we need 270 terawatt hours of hydrogen by 2050. That is the equivalent of creating within 30 years a hydrogen economy the same size as the total amount of electricity we use today on the grid.

While we have made strides in nuclear's future for our electricity system, it has a role far beyond electricity. The role of nuclear energy to decarbonise the other 50% of our future energy system is real—delivering large-capacity heat and electricity from a land-area footprint with orders of magnitude smaller than wind and solar. We need to make the UK the best place in the world to invest in commercial projects that leverage nuclear energy for system-wide decarbonisation, driving economic development and supporting levelling up the whole of the UK. Above all, in my opinion, we need to back all forms of nuclear technology, from fusion to fission, from gigawatt to micro, and from SMR to AMR. That probably puts me in the same camp as the baseball player of the noble Lord, Lord Howell.

Finally, the noble Lord, Lord West, is correct: there has been a very real worry globally about the lack of engineers, scientists and skilled workers necessary to keep the industry operating and properly regulated. The announcement in July of the creation of a Nuclear Skills Taskforce underlines the strategic approach the Government are pursuing in creating the next stage of our nuclear story. It will set up the industry for success and prosperity, making sure that our nation's ambitions for nuclear can power up Britain and our energy security for decades to come, helping us to achieve net zero by 2050, and beyond.

5 pm

Viscount Hanworth (Lab): Britain is experiencing an energy crisis. Despite its commitment to staunch the emissions of carbon dioxide, it remains heavily reliant on fossil fuels to power its industries and, more significantly, to power its transport and its electricity generation. The electricity generation is increasingly dependent on renewable sources of wind and solar

energy. These sources are intermittent and require to be supplemented by other means of generating electricity which depend, mainly, on gas purchased on the international markets at prices that are subject to extreme fluctuations. We would not be in our present position of vulnerability to international markets if we had maintained our nuclear industry.

At the beginning of the Cameron-Clegg coalition Government in 2010, it was proposed that contracts should be offered for building eight new nuclear power stations. Whereas the existing nuclear power stations had been financed by central government, it was decided, in accordance with the philosophy of the Conservative Party, that the new power stations should be financed by private capital. It would be tedious to recount the history of the repeated failures of the Government's nuclear policy. Over the succeeding 13 years, only one semi-nationalised enterprise, EDF, has undertaken to build a nuclear power station in Britain.

Politicians appear to have woken up, belatedly, to the crisis in our energy supply. A body called Great British Nuclear—GBN—has been established, which will be charged with overseeing the revival of our nuclear power industry. Its first activity will be to oversee a competition in which the favoured design of a small modular reactor—an SMR—will be chosen. This process is shrouded in secrecy, which inhibits a rational discussion of the options. It looks as if there will be a three-horse race, in which the competitors will be Rolls-Royce, GE Hitachi and X-energy, which are one British enterprise and two American enterprises.

It is galling to recall that Britain was the first nation to establish a civil nuclear industry. The world's first civil nuclear power station was opened at Calder Hall, in Cumbria, in 1956. The domestic and geopolitical circumstances at that time determined the nuclear technologies that have prevailed to this day. A covert purpose of the nuclear industry was to manufacture the plutonium that would be deployed in nuclear weapons. The first two reactors that were erected at Windscale, adjacent to Calder Hall, were devoted entirely to this purpose. The Calder Hall reactor, which was a gas-cooled Magnox reactor, was entirely devoted to the civil purpose of electricity power generation. Britain continued to pursue technological advances in this area. This led to the advanced gas-cooled reactors which power all but one of Britain's nuclear power stations. It also gave rise to a so-called pebble bed gas-cooled reactor, the Dragon reactor, in Winfrith, in Dorset, which operated from 1965 to 1976. Another experimental reactor was the sodium-cooled fast breeder reactor at Dounreay, which was capable of consuming the excess stocks of plutonium.

There were other developments in the United States. A leading proposal for a civil nuclear reactor was a thorium molten salt reactor that was advocated by Alvin Weinberg, of which a prototype was realised at the Oak Ridge laboratory. Weinberg encountered fierce opposition from Admiral Hyman Rickover, who was in charge of the American nuclear fleet. Rickover favoured a pressurised water reactor for submarines. The consequence was that such reactors have come to dominate both in civil nuclear power stations and in military applications in submarines and aircraft carriers.

[VISCOUNT HANWORTH]

The pressurised water reactor was favoured for submarine propulsion because it appeared to be light and compact. An irony is that, in its civil applications, it has spawned massive nuclear power stations that are burdened with safety devices designed to overcome the dangers of a pressurised nuclear meltdown, of the sort that we witnessed at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima.

This account of the available nuclear technology provides a backdrop to the British competition for a design of a small modular reactor. Rolls-Royce should be a front-runner in view of its experience with pressurised water reactor technology and in view of the fact it is a British enterprise. Its reactor would generate 470 megawatts. This exceeds the 300 megawatts which is the conventional limit of a small modular reactor. GE Hitachi is offering the tried and tested technology of a pressurised water reactor, packaged as an SMR and rated at 300 megawatts. This amounts to a small power station. Perhaps one would be more excited if GE Hitachi were to offer its fast sodium-cooled PRISM reactor, which would be capable of burning the plutonium of which there is an abundant stock at Sellafield. X-energy is proposing a pebble-bed reactor that is cooled by helium and which weighs in at 80 megawatts. It looks complicated. Among the complications are, first, the manufacture of the fuel pebbles; secondly, the deployment of the helium coolant; and, thirdly, a mechanism for the active control of the reaction. If this reactor were to be favoured, Britain would be importing from the United States a technology that it already pioneered in the 1960s via the Dragon reactor.

Other options are available to us which we are in danger of overlooking. Foremost of these is a British design for a molten-salt reactor, described as the MoltexFLEX reactor. This reactor has an inner core in the form of a collection of fuel rods that contain a salt-uranium reagent. Its cooling circuit, which transfers the power to a heat exchanger, also contains molten salt at a temperature of 750 degrees centigrade. The outer cooling circuit is powered solely by convection, with an absence of valves or pumps. The reactor is inherently safe. If, for some unimaginable reason, the reactor were to rupture, the escaping salt would quickly crystallise at a temperature of 550 degrees centigrade. A single MoltexFLEX reactor would produce 40 megawatts of energy; and it could be deployed on its own in an industrial application, which might use its heat, or a combination of heat and electricity generated by steam, using turbines. An electrical power station might contain a battery of 32 such reactors.

The MoltexFLEX prototype could be up and running before 2030. Therefore, it seems unaccountable to me that it has not also been considered as a front-runner. I have difficulty in understanding this. I presume that, in the minds of the civil servants, the advantage of the X-energy reactor, with which the MoltexFLEX might be compared, is that it is receiving funding from the United States Department of Defense and from the Department of Energy. Also, if the X-energy reactor were to be adopted in the UK there would be some inward financial investment, but these are insufficient

reasons for failing to sponsor a native design; yet I believe that they are typical of the thinking of the Civil Service and of the Government.

Three distinct purposes could be served by the various designs of nuclear reactors. First, we need nuclear power stations that contribute electricity to the grid. Various reactors are on offer for this role, which are mainly pressurised water reactors. At one end of a spectrum are the EPR reactors, rated at 4,500 megawatts thermal power, which are to be deployed in the mega power stations of Hinkley C and Sizewell C. At the other end of the spectrum are the small modular reactors of Rolls-Royce and GE-Hitachi. We should persist with Hinkley C and Sizewell C: but they should be succeeded by a fleet of SMRs from Rolls-Royce, which could be distributed widely throughout the country.

Secondly, there is the need for a much smaller reactor for powering industrial processes. The MoltexFLEX reactor should be chosen on the grounds of its simplicity and robustness.

Thirdly, there are fast reactors that are capable of burning the stocks of plutonium and of consuming other kinds of nuclear waste. The GE Hitachi PRISM reactor, which is finding favour in the USA, could be an appropriate choice.

I must ask the Minister to reveal the Government's appraisal of these opportunities and I seek an assurance that they will take steps vigorously to support our native endeavours, which include the Rolls-Royce SMR and the MoltexFLEX reactor.

5.09 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, the week before last I was speaking at the B20 in Delhi and today our Prime Minister is flying out to attend the G20 in Delhi. I was president of the Confederation of British Industry from June 2020 to June 2022, during which time I was privileged to chair the B7 when Britain hosted the G7. During my presidency I spoke to a leader in the nuclear industry about small modular reactors. He said in no uncertain terms that these reactors can be built within five years—and we have not even started building one.

An energy transition will take place over the coming years, moving from oil and gas to solar, hydrogen, wind—and nuclear, which will play a major part. The Government have very clearly outlined their ambitions to significantly increase nuclear power capacity, also saying that it is one of the most reliable technologies available to provide a baseload level of low-carbon electricity on a giant scale. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Howell, for initiating this debate on the role of nuclear energy in securing the future energy supply. It is crucial at this time.

However, the reality is that in the 1990s nuclear's share of our electricity supply in this country was almost 25% and today we are down to under 14%. It has almost halved in that period. The House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee said that the contribution of nuclear to the UK's energy mix will

“fall substantially by 2028, when all plants bar Sizewell B are scheduled to come to the end of their lives”.

We know that we must achieve net zero by 2050. Delivering new and advanced nuclear power was one of the 10 points in the Government's *Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution*. The Government published its *British Energy Security Strategy* for how Britain will accelerate homegrown power for greater energy independence, exacerbated and necessitated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The strategy described nuclear energy as

"the only form of reliable, low carbon electricity generation which has been proven at scale ... a big enough baseload of reliable power for our island".

The strategy set a target to generate 24 gigawatts of power by 2050, which is three times what we have and 25% of our projected electricity demand. So we are going to get to where we were in the 1990s. I think that we would want to get further than that.

Of course, we now have Great British Nuclear, officially launched in July this year. Grant Shapps, at that time Energy Secretary and now of course Defence Secretary, said when he launched it that

"we are seeing the first brushstrokes of our nuclear power renaissance to power up Britain and grow our economy for decades to come".

We talk about SMRs and say that we want to build them, but would the Minister acknowledge that a company such as Rolls-Royce wants to build SMRs around the world, yet I am told that many countries will not even allow it to tender unless it builds something in its own country, the UK. So, if the Government give Rolls-Royce the chance to set up a plant here quickly, that will enable it to export around the world. Rolls-Royce is, of course, one of Britain's great exporters. These SMRs can generate electric power up to 300 megawatts, compared with up to 1,400 megawatts for the giant plants, and they can be built very quickly.

However, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, Mr Shapps said that he did not expect SMRs to be online and producing energy until the 2030s. That is seven years from now, when an expert told me that we can build them in five years. Why are we not moving on this with much greater urgency?

My old university contemporary and friend at Cambridge, the former Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Greg Clark, said that, in the committee he chairs, "witness after witness" who appeared before the committee's inquiry highlighted the lack of a strategic plan for nuclear. He said that

"the government's stated aim to deploy a nuclear reactor a year is not grounded in any explanatory detail".

He added that it was unclear whether the 24-gigawatt target was intended to be met by gigawatt-scale, massive plants such as Hinkley Point C, or smaller, more distributed nuclear reactors such as SMRS. Could the Minister please confirm this? SMRs are quicker and cheaper to build, and you can build them right near the source where they will be supplying power.

The good news is that the Labour Party has expressed support for nuclear power: Keir Starmer has described it as

"a critical part of the UK's energy mix",

and the party has said that if it were in government, it would get new nuclear projects such as Hinkley and Sizewell over the line, extending the lifetime of existing plants, and would back new nuclear, including small modular reactors.

In the *FT* recently, just a week ago, Gillian Tett wrote an excellent article on nuclear power and the array of different companies we are competing with around the world, including Hitachi and GE. A race is taking place, and we need a sense of urgency. US President Joe Biden will be arriving at the G20 summit in Delhi and is very keen to partner with India on SMRs: specifically, the US wants to set up six nuclear reactors in India. Why are we not competing for those as well and doing business with India? Everyone wants to do business with India: it will be the third-largest economy in the world very soon and, in my view, the largest economy in the world by 2060.

The IAEA has also highlighted that African countries are looking to have SMRs built over there, which is another huge export opportunity for us. The small modular reactor market was valued at £3.5 billion in 2020 and is projected to reach almost £20 billion by 2030. This is an enormous opportunity for British business. We should be going at this at speed and with urgency. I am a stuck record in this Chamber. I keep asking: why are we not showing more urgency towards this, and why is our plan not clearer? Julia Pyke, joint managing director of Sizewell C, said that, if Hinkley had been on last year, UK consumers would have saved over £4 billion. Both projects will form a vital part of the future nuclear field, helping to lower carbon emissions and reduce costs.

The Government are investing, and I applaud that. Some 90% of our homes are heated by fossil fuels. By making our homes more fuel efficient, again we will be able to save so much. This will create many more jobs—tens of thousands more. Are we skilling people enough to be able to deal with this transition?

I conclude with this: if we go to plan and show a real sense of urgency, I believe we can reach that 25% of our power and 24 gigawatts much sooner than 2050.

5.17 pm

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Howell of Guildford for introducing this most timely debate on nuclear energy. I declare my interest as a member of the advisory board of Penultimate Power UK and as a consultant to Japan Bank for International Cooperation, which is a shareholder in NuScale Power LLC.

I strongly agree with everything my noble friend said in his comprehensive and inspiring introductory speech. It could have been so different, as is so powerfully brought home by the useful 8th report from the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee of another place on delivering nuclear power. From 1955 until 1995, government policy strongly favoured the construction of nuclear power stations: 10 Magnox and seven advanced gas-cooled reactor plants, and one pressurised water reactor plant at Sizewell B, were built. However, only one new reactor has been approved in last 28 years: the 3.2 gigawatt plant at Hinkley Point C.

[VISCOUNT TRENCHARD]

Today, nuclear power contributes roughly 15% of our electricity needs. That is expected to fall substantially before Hinkley Point C comes online, and the impending retirement of all our other nuclear power stations except Sizewell B means that, even then, the contribution of nuclear power to electricity generation will remain below current levels. I ask the Minister, why do the Government not recognise the need to increase substantially their plans for creating new nuclear capacity in this country beyond their current policy?

It is welcome that the energy security strategy, published in April last year, aims to achieve 24 gigawatts of nuclear capacity by 2050. However, the Government's net-zero obligations will require an enormous increase in electricity generation as consumers are forced to purchase electric cars and replace their oil and gas-fired heating systems with heat pumps. Whereas today electricity accounts for around 20% of total energy consumption, that is forecast to rise to 40% to 50% by 2050. The Government believe that renewable energy can provide the bulk of this. They speak of nuclear as playing an important back-up role in providing firm baseload power when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine. Unfortunately, that is for much of the time.

The briefing paper produced by the Library contains many useful and relevant facts. However, I believe it is misleading in its contention that the share of electricity generation provided by renewable energy has increased from 3% in 2000 to 42% in 2022. I understand that the 42% figure was maintained for around half an hour on one day in June 2022. Last Thursday, I understand that the contribution from wind was just 4.6%, which illustrates the unpredictable contribution of wind to electricity supply. Furthermore, the use of renewables is also inflated by the fact that they receive grid priority, meaning that the grid will always take electricity from renewable sources ahead of that available from other sources. This distorts the comparative costs, which are already significantly distorted by renewables subsidies and the cost of linking wind and solar facilities to the grid. The intermittency of wind and solar energy illustrates all too clearly the lack of storage facilities for all kinds of energy, and there is no capacity for long-term electricity storage.

The Government acknowledge that intermittent renewable energy requires firm baseload back-up such as nuclear and gas can provide, so why do we not install much more nuclear capacity, which does not have such a need for back-up? We would not need to make over so many thousands of acres to unpopular wind and solar farms, nor ruin Constable's beautiful Suffolk landscapes and other areas of outstanding natural beauty with even bigger electric pylons and power lines. It is unclear how the Government are going to realise their present target of 24 gigawatts and whether their ambition of one new reactor every year means a 1.6 gigawatt European pressurised reactor—such as the pair being built by EDF at Hinkley Point—or a 3.5 megawatt reactor by the Ultra Safe Nuclear Corporation, which has taken over the U-battery project formerly pursued by Urenco.

It is unclear what powers will be available to Great British Nuclear, and what its remit will be, beyond running an SMR competition which is under way.

This competition excludes high-temperature gas-cooled reactor technologies, as the UK and the UK alone classifies these as AMRs—advanced modular reactors—with which it brackets all other new technologies that are not light-water reactors, even though they are as ready for commercial development now as any of the technologies now undergoing the SMR competition.

Does the Minister accept that electricity is only part of the problem? There is little chance of achieving net zero without significant decarbonisation of industry; particularly heat required for chemical processes, paper, steel and glass, for example. Several AMRs can provide green industrial-grade heat, as well as power. For example, Japan's HTGR technology, which JAEA showcased for commercial development at the IAEA conference in Vienna in 2019, is arguably the most flexible and best potential source of industrial heat, energy and hydrogen. The NLL is now working with JAEA on developing a demonstrator by the early 2030s. This could be an exciting new Japanese-British project and would mitigate the disappointment resulting from the collapse of the two other bilateral projects: Hitachi's Horizon project at Wylfa and Toshiba's NuGen project at Sellafield Moorside.

However, unless plans and ambitions for this technology, which was originally developed by the UKAEA in Winfrith, Dorset, in 1965, as mentioned by the noble Viscount, Lord Hanworth, are rapidly and radically developed from the present modest R&D project with the National Nuclear Laboratory, all the available nuclear sites will have gone and we will have missed the opportunity to be Japan's partner for the rollout in the EMEA region of this extremely versatile and potentially cheap and efficient technology. We need a public-private joint venture consortium to develop this, in short order.

As a first step to try to keep open this exciting possibility, will the Minister discuss with the new Secretary of State whether she will, without delay, ask GBN to start comparing and assessing the leading HTGR technologies against the companies already in the SMR competition? There is no reason for them to be artificially held back and confined to the limited objectives of the AMR competition. The noble Viscount also spoke about the interesting MoltexFLEX reactor, which deserves more attention.

Lastly, I would like to hear the Minister's comment on the total absence of a level playing field between UK-based applicants to the ONR going through the GDA process and their US competitors. American nuclear consortia are at a huge advantage to their British competitors because the US Government are much more generous, with an element of state funding. Neither does this help for rebuilding a UK skills base.

I apologise for going over my time and look forward to the Minister's reply.

5.26 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, in following the noble Viscount, Lord Trenchard, I feel that I need to begin by defending the House of Lords Library and its briefing. Noble Lords might wish to follow the link provided in that briefing to the source of the figure of 42% of electricity generated from

renewables in 2022, which links to BEIS's *Energy Trends: UK Electricity ET5.1* document, which shows clearly that that is the annual figure.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Howell, for securing this debate and agree with many of the concerns he expressed about our current nuclear programme, its costs, its delays and the many problems with it. The House of Lords Library briefing looks at how we have seen a significant decline since the 1990s, when 24.5% of electricity came from nuclear. That is down to about 14% now. This is a dinosaur technology that was tried out in the 20th century, has proved to be a failure and is on the decline.

Our energy future very clearly is in renewables and, to use a phrase I do not believe I have heard mentioned today, energy conservation. The cleanest, greenest, best possible energy we can have is the energy we do not need to use. We need to look forward to a future of social innovation and innovation in the way we operate our societies that demands less energy, which will leave all of us better off in the pocket and in terms of the environment in which we live.

I referred to the decline of this dinosaur of the 20th century, but we are still very much bearing the costs. One of the first costs to look at in the UK context is the fact that the current estimate for clearing up the mess left by the industry from the last century is £260 billion, and that figure just keeps going up and up. We have referred a great deal to the problem of skill shortages in the nuclear sector. We have a huge problem with the shortage of skills for that clean-up, which is where a great deal of expertise naturally needs to be delivered.

It is also interesting that this debate was secured at the point where there is great controversy about what is happening at this moment in Fukushima, in Japan, where wastewater is being released from the destroyed nuclear plant. The figures are truly mind-boggling: there are currently 463 million gallons of contaminated water being held on that site, and they are collecting more contaminated water—26,000 gallons a day. One of the big concerns is the impact on the Japanese fishing industry, just one of the many ways in which nuclear has been a blight for many of the communities in which it has been sited.

A number of noble Lords have referred to the costs. There are many figures I could cite but France is often seen as a nuclear leader: Flamanville 3 cost €12.7 billion, a cost that more than quadrupled from the original quote in 2004. Something else that has not come up is the geopolitical cost. Many noble Lords will be aware of the recent coup in Niger. Niger supplies 15% of France's uranium, and a fifth of the EU's uranium stock comes from Niger. Uranium mining there was undoubtedly a political factor in instability. This is a real problem area.

To come back to the UK, an issue with Sizewell B is that the fuel comes from Russia, as does a great deal of EU fuel, with the obvious issues that I do not need to raise. Namibia is another potential source, but it reflects many of the same problems that are relevant to Niger. If we look to Australia—somewhere else that is often cited—we see that Rio Tinto, a mining company with a very dubious history, has recently been forced to

fork out a significant amount of the cost of 750 million Australian dollars for the rehabilitation of the Ranger uranium mine, which sits right in the middle of the Kakadu National Park and has been of great concern to the aboriginal inhabitants of the area as to the impacts. So we really have a situation where this is a dinosaur of the past.

I will pick up a couple of points raised by others in the debate. The word “baseload” keeps popping up. I will go to a quote that I go to often. In 2015, Steve Holliday, CEO of National Grid, said:

“The idea of large power stations for baseload is outdated”.

We are looking to a new, flexible, functional electricity system that works with what is available. It is a different kind of model—a model in which nuclear is a huge problem due to the lack of resilience and flexibility, as well as the lack of reliability.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bloomfield, talked about the land that might be required for solar and wind. Of course, if we put solar panels on our roofs, that is not taking up any extra land at all, and we should see a Britain with roofs covered with solar panels. We would love to take up some land for onshore wind—the cheapest source of electricity available to us—if the Government would actually allow that to go ahead, as so many people from so many parts of the sector are pushing for.

We need to look at some of the Government's actual models and the way they have been looking at this issue. The current power sector model—the dynamic dispatch model, which is used to justify current policy decisions—cannot model long-duration storage and is being replaced. I have already talked about how it is difficult and inflexible; that is the practical reality. EDF has suggested that Sizewell C EPR reactors could load follow and is exploring the option, but that has never been done before in the UK.

I come to one final main point—as far as I am concerned, this is the absolute killer argument against any new nuclear. If we look at the history of Flamanville and other recent builds of nuclear reactors, we see not only that the costs have exploded but that the construction time has gone on and on. Then we have the issues of reliability.

The fact is that we are in a climate emergency. Renewables are there now. All those roofs are sitting there ready to have solar panels put on them. We need to act fast and now with proven technologies. Nuclear has been a continual disaster. It has been continually unreliable. We need an energy future based on renewables and energy conservation.

5.34 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, I cannot compete with many of the speakers in this debate in their degree of expertise and knowledge on this subject. It has been more like an adult education seminar than a political debate, except perhaps for the last contribution from the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, which was typically robust and in her own style.

I come to this as a natural supporter of nuclear power, in the first instance, and as a Cumbrian, which I think puts me in a unique position on this issue. I was a natural supporter of nuclear power from what my

[LORD LITTLE]

mother told me when I sat on her knee. She was brought up in a pit village in west Cumberland and her view was that nuclear was wonderful because it meant that people like my father would not have to go down the pit working a 2.5-foot seam in very dangerous conditions and that this would supply us with the power that we need without that dreadful human cost. I took that on board, and I think there are still a lot of people who think like that.

As several noble Lords have pointed out, west Cumberland is the birthplace, as it were, of the British nuclear industry. It is where Windscale and Calder Hall were located. I even remember that when I was at school, there was an accident and we were all told we could not drink school milk for many weeks—which as a child I was very puzzled by—because of the proximity to the activities there. West Cumberland is still the centre of British nuclear skills. All the skills involved in the clean-up at Sellafield are very important. My regret is that we have never managed to internationalise, for instance, the robotics which have been developed to deal with the nuclear waste in the ponds into a global competitive industry, which we should have been able to do. The National Nuclear Laboratory has lots of interesting ideas about the future of nuclear and they should be taken forward, but the tragedy for me as a Cumbrian is that at the moment we do not seem to appear much in the plans for the future of the industry, other than as dealing with waste and the possibility of a long-term waste repository.

The noble Lord, Lord Howell, in his very analytical approach at the start of the debate said that we are at a fork in the road; we could go one way towards big reactors on the Sizewell model or the other way towards smaller nuclear reactors. I rather agree with my noble friend Lord West of Spithead that we should do a bit of both. That seems the most risk-free option. The trouble with Britain is that, when we come to these forks in the road, we dither and argue. We have been stop-start on our nuclear policy for the past 30 years. When the noble Lord, Lord Howell, was Energy Minister, we were pushing ahead with a great programme; it was with Mrs Thatcher's full support but, at the end of the 1980s, that all collapsed. Labour dithered around for quite some time when we came in in 1997 and then decided that we would go ahead with a big nuclear programme. Then we had the coalition, and the Lib Dems said that they would not allow any public funding of nuclear.

There has to be an element of public funding or public guarantee. No private sector company will undertake totally on its own the risks of construction costs running beyond what was anticipated; nor will they bear the very uncertain risks of clean-up at the end of the life of the station. There must be a public-private partnership of some kind in this area if we are going to get anywhere, but we seem to have dithered about it for years and years.

We have got to the point in Cumberland where the only industrial project that has been touted is a new coal mine, which is absolutely ridiculous. What could be more backward-looking than the idea of a new coal

mine in west Cumbria when we have a whole lot of expertise that should be able to contribute to a nuclear revival that must play an important part in the fight against climate change?

We need a plan from the Government. I applaud the idea of setting up Great British energy, or whatever it is called, as it might give some coherence to these issues, but we need a plan. At the moment, there is no plan for energy that relates to the grid, which is a huge, unresolved question. What is our plan for the grid? That needs to be put in place. Much of the plan for the grid depends on where you have the generation. I am not making a party-political point, but a general point that we seem to have dithered a lot on all this. I hope the Minister will tell us that we will now get some action.

5.43 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, for tabling this really important debate and for his very balanced introduction. It is always a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Little. I may not agree with his support for nuclear, but I now understand where it is coming from.

When I looked down the list of speakers for this debate, I feared that I would be in a minority of those urging caution before taking costly, long-term decisions that would lock us into a new generation of nuclear power plants—whether they be large gigawatt plants, such as EDF's Sizewell C; the as-yet unproven at scale small modular reactors; or the more exotic advanced modular reactors. So it has proved to be: I am in the minority.

I hope that all speakers in this debate will acknowledge my very firm belief that we must act with extreme urgency to tackle the existential crisis of climate change. Let me assure noble Lords that I would grab with both hands any solution that proponents say could deliver 25% of our clean energy needs by 2050.

However, it is highly questionable whether those claims for nuclear energy are deliverable at a speed dictated by accelerating climate change, cost effectively and at scale, to meet our 2030 target for decarbonised electricity. Often it is a case of jam tomorrow, and nuclear is very expensive jam. It is eye-wateringly expensive, and investment from the private sector is proving to be a challenge. Let us take the example of Sizewell C, the overall cost of which remains shrouded in secrecy. The last published figure, circa £20 billion, dates back to May 2020. I ask the Minister to tell your Lordships' House how much the Government estimate that it will cost now. He should know, because a capital raise was expected to begin in 2023, with a final investment decision due in 2024.

As I understand it, UK pension funds are not enthused, with Legal and General, NEST, BT and NatWest ruling Sizewell C out. The Government's plan to include nuclear in the UK's green taxonomy is unlikely to be a game-changer. The House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee in its July 2023 report on nuclear energy has called for greater transparency on Sizewell C's costs, its value for money and level of risk, as well as its impact on households, which already face an escalating cost of living crisis. The regulated asset base model, replacing the failed

contracts for difference deal struck for Hinkley Point C to pay for nuclear, really is deplorable; it leaves the British taxpayer on the hook for undefined costs as a sweetener for commercial interests.

The optimism of the British energy security strategy in backing new large nuclear projects has failed to generate commensurate enthusiasm from commercial operators. I am afraid that the legacy of nuclear disasters such as Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima still loom large in people's memories. Will Sizewell C happen? Who knows? It is beset with problems. French state-owned EDF alone can deliver the European pressurised water reactor. However, it is committed to urgent expansion of French nuclear power, raising serious questions about EDF's priority in delivering Sizewell C for the UK at the speed required.

Hinkley Point C may or may not open in 2027, so the Government are banking on small modular reactors, smaller versions of conventional water-cooled nuclear reactors. Many different designs are being worked on around the world—about 50, at the last count—yet there is no clear winner. For the moment, our Government are backing the Rolls-Royce choice of design. But here is the rub: these SMRs are proving to be ferociously difficult to standardise for their stated USP, modular assembly. It turns out that nuclear power is site-specific and does not lend itself easily to repetitive design.

The July 2023 Commons Select Committee report on nuclear says:

“Neither SMRs nor AMRs are ready for commercial deployment”.

These are not technologies that will be deployable in the necessary timescale. Another fundamental issue with nuclear is that it is not indigenous in the way that our renewables, such as wind and solar, are. It relies on supplies of enriched uranium. We used to import enriched uranium for Sizewell B from Russia. Could the Minister say where we get it from now?

Even if we were to resurrect our own enrichment capabilities, we would nevertheless be dependent on the import of the mined raw material. The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle, has already talked about some of the geopolitical issues surrounding this. There are those who speak about the reuse of spent fuel, but that technology is not yet deliverable.

The Commons Select Committee report also points out that there is strong competition for resources and minerals, both within the UK and internationally. For example, large domestic infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the nuclear programmes in France for six new nuclear reactors draw on the same skills and resources supply chain that will be needed for our nuclear new build. There is also the fundamental question of whether nuclear reactors are suitable for providing flexible energy to fill gaps left by the intermittency of renewables such as wind and sun, when we need power that can be readily turned on and off. Nuclear reactors do not take kindly to this. Fission is a chain reaction. Once it is going, it is much cheaper and safer to let it continue than to stop-start it. Its inflexibility makes it unsuitable for the role envisaged for it in a net zero future. Not only is it eye-wateringly costly, historically it has been beset by delivery problems, has a complex supply chain and a lack of skilled UK workers. Nuclear does not even solve the baseload problem.

I have not even touched on decommissioning. I know a little about it, as the international maritime transport of spent nuclear fuel was the subject of my master's dissertation at Imperial College. Decommissioning deserves a debate of its own, so big and intractable is the problem. Stanford University's recent research on the huge amount of additional toxic nuclear waste generated by SMRs that will be added to piles of legacy waste is a frightening read. There is no depository for it anywhere in the world, despite decades of trying. I assure the Minister that if these fairly substantial barriers to nuclear energy could be overcome, I would wholeheartedly support it. Otherwise, I am much more minded to solve the intermittency problems with maybe boring but pragmatic and quickly deliverable additional renewables. Energy efficiency, interconnectors and storage, both short and long term, also have a vital part to play and are achievable today.

In conclusion, my view is that the better, flexible baseload option would be to invest in tidal power, where the billions spent on nuclear would bear better fruit and be truly green—and British—in the way that nuclear never could be.

5.53 pm

Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, for securing this important debate. I thank all noble Lords who have contributed for their well-informed and welcome efforts to explain such a complex area. The Library staff in both Houses have done an excellent job with their briefings.

We all know that our energy supply reliability and affordability are at the forefront of the thinking of many in government departments at all levels, as well as across industry and consumers. This focus is generated not only by net zero considerations, but by concern about security of supply and cost of living considerations. We now have a clear sense that the clock is ticking fast, and a focus on delivering alternatives to gas should be paramount.

Supporters of nuclear say that it can provide reliable baseload power, bolster energy security, provide industrial or domestic heat and potentially reduce the legacy of nuclear waste produced by reactors and weapons through reuse as fuel. Nuclear power is also a low-carbon power source, as the fission process produces no greenhouse gas emissions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated that the average full-cycle emissions of nuclear are below those of fossil fuels and, indeed, some renewables. The uncomfortable truth, as we have heard, is that the contribution of nuclear power to the total energy supply has fallen significantly since the 1990s and is set to decrease further over coming years. Numerous factors have contributed to this, as we have heard. The upfront cost of nuclear power can exceed that of other sources, leading to the need for subsidies or long contract settlements. The meltdown of Fukushima in 2011, on top of previous disasters, contributed to a weakening of global public support for nuclear power and a new series of safety measures that only added, of course, to costs and timescales. Also, the accumulation of nuclear waste continues to draw criticism due to a lack of disposal solutions; some point to renewables such as wind and solar as a cleaner alternative.

[BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS]

It is fair to say that it is still a politically controversial energy source, as we have heard. Some commentators have questioned the value for money of nuclear power, particularly the Hinkley C deal, following a fall in the cost of renewables such as offshore wind. One thing we have not stressed enough today is how we tackle the attitude of the public. Unless we recognise that the public are at best agnostic on this, we will continue to struggle to deliver the solutions we need. I believe that winning over public support will be key and needs to have far more of a focus.

Labour supports the development of nuclear power as an integrated element of our planning and long-term strategy to deliver our future energy needs. It is interesting to reflect back on when the Labour Government came in. As we have heard, there was an interregnum, if you like, in commitment in this area, but in 2006 Tony Blair, addressing the CBI as Prime Minister, made a very prescient comment:

“The facts are stark. By 2025, if current policy is unchanged, there will be a dramatic gap on our targets to reduce CO₂ emissions; we will become heavily dependent on gas; and at the same time move from being 80/90%, self-reliant in gas to 80/90% dependent on foreign imports, mostly from the Middle East and Africa and Russia”.

How that has come home to roost.

The change happened from there. The Labour Government published the *Energy Challenge* review, saying that there was no one single energy solution and calling for new nuclear to be included, with a wider push for renewables and energy efficiency to achieve a low-carbon, secure and affordable supply of energy, and Gordon Brown continued this, releasing a White Paper on nuclear power. In 2011 the coalition Government, despite their difficulties, developed this and identified eight sites suitable for new nuclear reactors. All these proposed reactors are classed as generation III or generation III+ reactors.

What happened next? Conservative Governments from 2015 have continued to support new nuclear. The final go-ahead for Hinkley Point C was given by the May Government in 2016. In December 2020 the Johnson Government set out, in the *Energy White Paper*, the aim

“to bring at least one large-scale nuclear project to the point of Final Investment Decision by the end of this Parliament, subject to clear value for money and all relevant approvals”,

and so it has continued. However, the collapse of private sector support for a new plant at Moorside in November 2018 and the suspension of the Hitachi project at Wylfa in January 2019 cast doubt on the future of nuclear plants in the UK, and the Johnson Government did then come forward with a plan to come up with alternative financing models.

All this begs the question of where we stand today, and I hope the Minister will be able to answer some the questions that have been raised and give some much-needed clarity around future and long-term planning. First, we need an explanation of why there has been no delivery of nuclear projects over the past 13 years. I support my noble friend Lord Liddle's comments and ask the Minister whether Great British Nuclear has a long-term, clear strategy and an investment plan. Will there be a final investment decision on

Sizewell C by the end of this Parliament? Moving on from Sizewell, where is the promised announcement on developing a pipeline of new nuclear projects? Promises were made in November 2022 at the launch of Great British Nuclear that plans would be announced earlier this year. Where are those plans?

I firmly believe there is enormous private sector ambition and interest in developing nuclear to its rightful place in contributing to the mix of energy solutions. There is real interest in the thousands of jobs that will be created if the programmes go ahead, but there are serious questions for the Government to answer. First, concerning site provision and associated planning matters, how are the Government going to get these sites away? How will they work to unlock investment and, importantly, what will their contribution be? How can we move away from considering just one proposal at a time to having a long-term plan, including a whole series of proposals—the so-called “fleet deployment approach”?

We have known that successive Governments have supported nuclear power. Reactor designs have of course changed over time, from advanced gas-cooled reactors to pressurised water reactors, to European pressurised reactors and other new advanced designs, as we have heard today. The current and previous Conservative Governments have also been supportive of innovation, such as small modular reactors, fast reactors, molten salt reactors and other generation IV designs. However, I hope that at the end of the session today we will have a much clearer idea of how all this is going to be brought into play. We need certainty and a long-term plan to resolve these matters, and to enable nuclear to fulfil its potential and contribute to tackling the worsening energy and climate crisis that faces us all.

6.02 pm

Lord Mott (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Howell for securing this important and timely debate. I had the pleasure of sitting down with him yesterday morning to discuss nuclear policy in greater detail. I must say that his enthusiasm and expertise in this area are unmatched, and I thank him for his ongoing support for the civil nuclear industry in the UK. I thank also all noble Lords for participating in the debate and for their valuable contributions. I welcome the support for nuclear we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Blake; this is an important signal for the industry. I would also like to reference at the outset my support for the Legislators for Nuclear initiative, as referenced by my noble friend Lady Bloomfield and the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale. I understand that noble Lords met earlier this week with my ministerial colleague, Andrew Bowie MP, to discuss this further. I look forward to receiving an update on the progress of this work.

As the noble Viscount, Lord Hanworth, and the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, rightly pointed out, it is 70 years since construction began on the world's first commercial nuclear power plant at Calder Hall in Cumbria. This incredible technology is undergoing a revival. Climate change, soaring global energy prices and improving nuclear technology have all prompted a rethink in our strategic priorities and, over the last 18 months, Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has

highlighted the enduring importance of energy security. This Government recognise the major role nuclear power has played, and will continue to play, in our own energy mix: not only delivering energy security but helping us to decarbonise.

That is why, last year, the Government set out in the British energy security strategy plans to generate up to a quarter of the country's electricity from nuclear by 2050. To achieve this, we remain committed to the full spectrum of nuclear technologies, from traditional large-scale reactor projects through to exploring more innovative small, advanced and even microreactor designs. That is also why we have launched Great British Nuclear, to ensure we have the right structures in place to help deliver the nuclear programme.

The Government have committed to a new programmatic approach to the delivery of nuclear projects going forward, giving industry and investors the confidence to make the necessary investments that will help deliver projects at pace, while also reducing costs through learning and replication. To deliver this programme, we have launched Great British Nuclear—GBN—which will be an arm's-length body responsible for helping to enable new nuclear projects, backed with the funding it needs.

GBN will apply a programmatic approach to both project deployment and technology selection. This has two key advantages: it will send the right signals to the sector, to provide long-term certainty and facilitate investment in the supply chain and skills; and it will offset the gradual retirement of existing capacity, strengthening UK energy independence while being central to delivering the decarbonisation needs set out by the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett.

GBN's first priority is to identify the small modular reactor technologies best able to deliver a final investment decision by the end of 2029 and deliver projects in the mid-2030s, potentially releasing multi-billions of pounds of private and public investment to build SMR technologies on sites. To this end, following a market engagement exercise, GBN invited SMR technology vendors to register their interest in a technology selection process. The initial application window is now closed, with the ambition being to assess and decide on the leading technologies by the autumn.

In response to the question of the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and as Minister Bowie said this morning at the World Nuclear Symposium, the UK's technology selection process is three times quicker than that of any contemporary country and gives a unique rigour to the way that the UK selects SMR technology—something that we think will make the UK highly competitive globally.

In response my noble friend Lord Howell's question about those reactors that have not yet sought government financing, I reiterate that, while GBN's initial focus is the SMR down-selection process, the Government remain strongly committed to the full spectrum of nuclear technologies and continue to consider how all technologies could further contribute to UK energy security. For the companies referenced by my noble friend Lord Howell, the Government have committed to consult in the autumn on alternative routes to

market for nuclear projects, in addition to that provided by the Great British Nuclear small ordmodular reactor technology selection process.

To respond to the question of the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, on the balance between GW and SMRs, the evidence received will help shape future policy and ensure that the UK's nuclear programme is as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.

The Government are particularly keen to understand where Great British Nuclear and the Government could support the private sector to bring forward projects, and to understand the different technology designs—as referred to by the noble Viscount, Lord Hanworth, in his speech—particularly the safety, security and non-proliferation considerations that come with different technologies. As the noble Viscount pointed out when he described the range of different technologies being developed, the Government have recognised this.

To support different designs, the Government have launched the future nuclear enabling fund of up to £120 million, to provide targeted support for new nuclear development. The aim of the FNEF is to help industry reduce project costs, so that it is better positioned for future investment decisions. In July 2023, the Government shortlisted potential grants from the FNEF. This will release up to £77.1 million, to remove barriers to entry for nuclear projects.

In response to the comment of the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on the supply chain, with the Government's long-term plans for the deployment of civil nuclear to up to 24 gigawatts by 2050, strengthening domestic capabilities and capacity is a high priority. The development of further nuclear new build, regardless of technology, is likely to bring further supply chain companies to market.

There is good reason for GBN's initial focus on SMRs. As my noble friend Lord Howell echoed, not only are they potentially less capital intensive to build than traditional nuclear power plants, because of their smaller size, but factory-based modular manufacturing is expected to make them more flexible to deploy, ultimately helping to secure our energy supply and bring down carbon emissions. Importantly, our support for SMRs dates back to 2020, when the Government announced the £385 million advanced nuclear fund to support pioneering SMR designs and to demonstrate an advanced modular reactor by the early 2030s. Of this funding, which a number of my noble friends recognised, up to £210 million was awarded to Rolls-Royce SMR Ltd to ensure that the SMR technology can continue to be developed and progressed according to the UK's robust regulatory regime.

As my noble friend Lord Trenchard correctly pointed out, nuclear is not just about electricity generation; it is vital to decarbonising the wider heat and water industries. The Government recognise that advanced nuclear innovation creates opportunities for new uses of nuclear energy beyond electricity. That is at the heart of the partnership he referenced between the UK and Japan on high-temperature gas reactors. IT is also central to the Government's commitment to demonstrate an AMR and the associated R&D fund being allocated in the advanced nuclear fund. Furthermore, we have committed to consult on additional routes to market for nuclear projects later in the autumn.

[LORD MOTT]

Delivery of the first reactor building at Hinkley Point C is now well under way. When finished, Hinkley will provide 7% of the country's electricity, as well as an enormous boost to both the local and national economy, with up to 25,000 new employment opportunities. In response to my noble friend Lord Howell, EDF is aiming for reactor 1 to start commercial operations in June 2027, with reactor 2 forecast to start operating a year later. The cost has moved from between £22 billion and £23 billion to between £25 billion and £26 billion in 2015 monies. The drivers behind this cost and schedule increase are the Covid pandemic, with inefficiencies caused by working restrictions, and an overoptimistic initial cost and schedule estimate by EDF.

In response to the question about Chinese participation in Hinkley Point C from my noble friend Lord Howell, CGN is a minority partner in financing and building Hinkley Point C. It is not involved in major supply chain contracts at Hinkley Point C, nor is it involved in the instrumentation, control systems or any other critical function of the plant, including the intellectual property of the reactor.

Furthermore, the Hinkley project has already revealed a huge amount about how to plan and build large-scale schemes, which will be crucial in the development of the sister project at Sizewell C. That will allow lessons to be learned and costs to be controlled directly in response to delivery challenges, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, highlighted in her speech.

Last November, the Government announced an historic £700 million investment in Sizewell C, the first direct investment in a large-scale nuclear project for more than three decades and directly responding to the delivery challenges highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Liddle. As shareholders in this project, we have been pressing ahead with Sizewell C's development. This summer, we invested and made available a further £511 million to mature the project further. Making that funding available now will mean that the project can start construction faster at the point of any final investment decision being made. From that, we would expect a result in cost savings and faster overall delivery. We are also continuing to develop plans with EDF and the project to raise private capital later this year, using our newly established regulated asset base model for nuclear. In response to my noble friend Lady Bloomfield, that will further develop the attractiveness of the industry as a place to invest.

In answer to my noble friend Lord Howell, Sizewell C is expected to be generating power by the mid-2030s, but the timescales for construction will depend on the outcome of our ongoing development of this project. I can assure the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, that the timing of a final investment decision is intended to be in this Parliament. As a near-exact replica of Hinkley Point C, Sizewell C will benefit from the lessons learned and the established supply chain of that project, providing high levels of maturity and de-risking the project relative to other options.

As I am sure the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, will appreciate, the capital costs for Sizewell C are commercially sensitive and subject to ongoing negotiations, which means that we cannot at this stage disclose them.

My noble friend Lord Howell asked about Taishan and the quality issue. Framatome has rectified the known issue with the redesign of the fuel assembly for Taishan and it is important to note that Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C use a different design.

To ensure that all this delivers energy security for the United Kingdom, we need to ensure a secure supply of nuclear fuel for future UK reactor fleets and those of our allies. As the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, noted, the UK is in the envious position of having deep fuel cycle capabilities. Preserving and growing this capability to benefit ourselves and our allies is at the heart of the Government's ambition in the Atlantic declaration earlier in the year for the UK to have full front-end fuel cycle capabilities by the end of the decade, and we have been investing in the sector to deliver that commitment.

As my noble friend Lady Bloomfield correctly pointed out, at the start of the year the Government also launched a nuclear fuel fund of up to £50 million, which will be match-funded by industry, to strengthen our domestic fuel production capability. This is on top of the £13 million we awarded to Westinghouse Springfields Fuels Ltd last autumn to support a venture to convert freshly mined and recycled uranium. Again, this was match-funded to deliver £26 million in benefit to the UK.

To respond to the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, the fuel supply for Sizewell B is the responsibility of the operator, EDF, which sources it from the wider EDF supply chain. However, the investments into nuclear fuel facilities in the UK by the nuclear fuel fund are exactly designed to bring new capabilities to the UK and to those who source nuclear fuels, including operators such as EDF. These investments will strengthen UK fuel production capability, develop supply chains for advanced fuels and bolster efforts to diversify nuclear fuel production capacity away from Russia.

While the sourcing of civil fuel is a commercial decision for the reactor operator, I can assure the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, that the Government, in partnership with our allies, continue to look at how we strengthen and secure fuel supplies for our future reactors to ensure that they are not dependent on Russia. I note in particular the SMR technology selection criteria as an example of how we are doing this. I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, that the UK's unique position here, unlike that of most of our global competitors, will increase the export potential for SMRs.

The noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, asked about medical isotopes. The Government have launched a medical radionuclide innovation programme to identify where further government intervention is required to secure UK supplies, including an ongoing call for evidence from industry to inform this.

Of course, to achieve our ambitions, we must also demonstrate how to deal with our nuclear legacy safely and responsibly by providing the disposal route for the waste. This will also support the delivery of new nuclear projects that the Government are committed to bringing forward.

To answer the noble Lord, Lord West, we are making progress with plans to develop a geological disposal facility to dispose of our most hazardous

radioactive waste and the waste that will arise from new nuclear projects. The siting process for the GDF is under way. It is a consent-based approach which requires a willing community to be a partner in the project's development. Four areas have entered the siting process—some very close to the heart and home of the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, and the home of the UK's world-beating decommissioning expertise. Three areas are in Cumberland—in Copeland and Allerdale—and one is in Theddlethorpe in Lincolnshire. Geological investigations in the shape of a marine geophysical survey were conducted last summer off the coast of Copeland, Cumberland.

On skills, which the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and my noble friends Lady Bloomfield and Lord Trenchard correctly highlighted, we will of course need to address a key challenge in delivering our nuclear ambitions, ensuring that we have sufficient skills across our nuclear enterprise. The new Nuclear Skills Taskforce will ensure that the UK's defence and civil nuclear sectors have the right people with the right skills to seize growth opportunities. It will build on existing work, cohering and turbocharging actions to address the skills challenges across the whole nuclear sector.

Finally, I will address the question on planning from the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, and the comments from the noble Baroness, Lady Blake. Although the process brought in by the Planning Act 2008 has been successful, we recognise that the current volumes and the complexity of applications have introduced greater challenges and resulted in longer timeframes for reviewing decisions over recent years. This is why we are pressing ahead with our action plan for reform. Furthermore, we are developing a new nuclear national policy statement, or NPS, which will cover the deployment of new nuclear power stations beyond 2025. This new NPS will take into account the changes in the nuclear landscape since the current NPS was published in 2011, including the realistic potential for deployment of advanced nuclear technologies such as SMRs.

To conclude, when construction began at Calder Hall seven decades ago, nuclear power was a bright and shining beacon that promised cheap, clean and reliable energy. Today we are witnessing the beginnings of a renaissance in nuclear power, only this time we have the proven, reliable and safe technology required to exploit its full potential and a Government determined to do everything we can to ensure that the UK remains a world leader in civil nuclear power. I thank noble Lords again for their varied yet equally important contributions to this debate.

6.21 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his comprehensive wind-up. He answered many of our questions—almost all, I think, although perhaps not one or two. I thank all those who have taken part in this debate with an excellent mixture of expertise, judgment and wisdom, all of which are needed in this issue. The debate has been short but the issues are absolutely vast, and we will have to return to them again and again in the coming months and years. I am particularly grateful that the general tone is very strong support for the newer technologies, the smaller machines, the quicker build and the better prospect of attracting private investment.

If anything is missing, it is slightly that question of finance. I see shadows of the magic money tree again. The *FT* ran an article yesterday based on the view of the noble Lord, Lord Stern, that the energy transition is going to cost £100 trillion spread over the next 27 years. Yet we know that there is no more money—indeed, the Labour shadow Chancellor always recognises that. It is rather like in 2010; there was no more money then, although for different reasons, and now there is no more money. Where is it going to come from? The answer is that there is masses of money around the world, in the pension funds and the sovereign wealth funds, but it will come into our system only if it is investable. If we build giant white elephants on yesterday's technology, no one will touch it, and certainly not investors. That is my only regret.

There is expert knowledge and, I hope, a momentum from this short debate for us to move forward into areas where we can attract the private money, the waste is limited, popular understanding of and support for what has to happen is increased, and we are able to move forward towards our goals of a low-carbon, green energy economy and a prosperity that at the moment seems to be eluding us.

Motion agreed.

Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill *Returned from the Commons*

*The Bill was returned from the Commons with a reason.
It was ordered that the Commons reason be printed.*

House adjourned at 6.24 pm.

Grand Committee

Thursday 7 September 2023

Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointment Functions) Regulations 2023

Considered in Grand Committee

1 pm

Moved by Lord Caine

That the Grand Committee do consider the Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointment Functions) Regulations 2023.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office (Lord Caine) (Con): My Lords, I beg to move that these draft regulations, which were laid before this House on 10 July, be approved. The Government are committed to the 1998 Belfast agreement and our priority, as always, is to see the return of locally elected, accountable and fully functioning devolved government, which is and will remain the right way for Northern Ireland to be governed. In the absence of devolved government, the UK Government are committed to acting in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland to ensure good governance until an Executive are restored.

In December last year, primary legislation was passed which, among other measures, addressed the need for urgent public appointments to be made to a number of bodies. The initial phase of appointments under that legislation, the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022, gave provisions for the Secretary of State to appoint a commissioner for children and young people. It further gave provisions for the Lord Chancellor to make appointments to the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

The 2022 Act also included provision for the Secretary of State to add by way of regulations to the list further urgent and necessary appointments that may arise during the continuing absence of a functioning Executive. This statutory instrument therefore includes a further list of specified offices which have been identified by the Executive Office in Northern Ireland as urgent and critical. These were not originally provided for in the Act, as urgent action was not required at that time.

To prepare this instrument, my officials have worked closely with the Northern Ireland Civil Service departments, including the Executive Office, to identify the further critical appointments which have arisen, some of which have already faced difficulties and been unable to exercise their statutory duties and functions, due to the absence of Ministers, one example of this being the Tourism Northern Ireland Board.

This instrument therefore adds to the list in Section 6 of the Executive formation Act, thereby enabling the Secretary of State, as the relevant UK Minister, to exercise a Northern Ireland Minister's appointments function in relation to the offices listed in Regulation 2(2) of this statutory instrument. These are important offices and the exercise of appointments functions in the coming months is critical for the continuing good governance of Northern Ireland. I beg to move.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): I thank the Minister for his introduction and obviously wholly support him in what he is required to do. I have just a couple of issues to raise. We were having an informal discussion about one of them, but it would be useful if the Minister could put on the record just what the process is for the confirmation.

Secondly, there is rather a paucity of people present for this debate, including representatives from Northern Ireland, and that is the nub of our problem. The reality is that Ministers, including the noble Lord, should not have to be doing this. It is a total betrayal of the proper interests of the people of Northern Ireland that this is not being decided by their democratically elected politicians. The Minister even hinted at the fact that it is creating problems. There are vacancies which have not easily been filled and that is affecting the functions.

I wonder how many more times we can go through this process before this Government, or another Government, will have to initiate a change. To my mind—I will say this explicitly—the Democratic Unionist Party may be unionist but it is certainly not democratic, because the reality is that it is not representing the people of Northern Ireland and not even representing the people who voted for it. But it is denying the majority of the people of Northern Ireland effective governance and that is causing real hardship, real difficulty and real suffering.

Finally, the argument put forward is that they are not going to go back until their seven tests are met, yet those tests are entirely irreconcilable. They are not achievable. They are not actually possible. On that basis, we are left asking, “Is there any intention of them returning or any circumstances under which they will?” I know that the Minister has many conversations and dialogues, but I do not know whether he feels that we have any chance of getting the Executive and the Assembly back. We cannot go on doing this year in, year out, without addressing the problem and doing something about it. I know that that is not the subject of this debate—I absolutely support what the Minister is trying to do—but I would be grateful if he could briefly tell us about the process for appointments.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I, too, start by echoing those sentiments. Obviously, the solution is to get the Stormont Government and the Assembly up and running. In yesterday's Oral Questions in the other place, this issue was specifically addressed. The Minister there responded to my right honourable friend Hilary Benn, who asked what plans there are and what conversations are being had, by saying that conversations with the DUP are constantly ongoing and that some progress is apparently being made. I hope that the Minister here can echo that positive side of things because the solution rests with getting the democratic institutions back up and running.

I turn to the specifics of the SI. I am sure that it is good practice and an ongoing practice for all relevant departments to do this but, certainly when we see that the specific urgent appointments include the Agricultural Wages Board and the Labour Relations Agency, I just want to be reassured that the practice of

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]
consulting properly with stakeholders, in particular with the trade unions concerned in Northern Ireland, is taking place.

With those few comments, I will leave it to the Minister to respond.

Lord Caine (Con): I am grateful to the noble Lords, Lord Bruce of Bennachie and Lord Collins of Highbury, for their contributions to this SI debate, which is definitely a record, it being the shortest I have had to deal with since becoming a Northern Ireland Office Minister. I am sorry that some colleagues from Northern Ireland could not be present today.

On the couple of points that were made, I echo entirely both noble Lords' comments in respect of getting Stormont back up and running at the earliest opportunity. The noble Lord, Lord Bruce, is right that the current situation is not sustainable and that the arrangements for governing Northern Ireland are not right for the long term. We need to return to a proper, stable, functioning devolved Government, as set out in the 1998 agreement.

As far as progress is concerned, I can say that, yes, progress is being made. We all know the reasons why the Democratic Unionist Party withdrew its Ministers last year. We are working hard. Obviously, we achieved the Windsor Framework in February this year; we are now working hard to clarify and address any outstanding concerns. As my right honourable friend made clear in the other place yesterday, conversations are taking place constantly and are ongoing. I myself held a round of discussions with each of the Northern Ireland political parties shortly before the Summer Recess. The Secretary of State is continuing with that. Obviously, conversations with the Irish Government took place last week at the British-Irish Association conference. We are continuing the dialogue. Naturally, I cannot put a timetable on this, but it is pressing and we need a return as quickly as possible; we are working flat out towards that end.

On the process for making these appointments, the devolved Northern Ireland government departments will continue to run the recruitment processes in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland code of practice. In direct response to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, that enables consultation with a wide range of partners, but ultimately it is for the department to run the process. We are not interfering in or taking over in that sense. The role of the Secretary of State is simply to substitute for what would normally be done by a Minister in charge of the relevant Northern Ireland department. The process will run in exactly the same way it would if devolution were up and running. The only difference is that the sign-off will not be a Northern Ireland Minister but—unfortunately, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves—the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

It is interesting that a number of the appointments identified in this SI were dealt with by the UK Government four years ago when Sinn Féin was keeping the institutions of the Assembly down between 2017 and 2020. A number of those appointments were made at the time, and they have run their four-year course. We unfortunately

find ourselves having to repeat the same exercise. Like the noble Lords, Lord Bruce and Lord Collins, I sincerely hope that we do not have to do this again and that we can achieve a situation in which the institutions are fully functioning and up and running, and the Belfast agreement, which we all strongly support, is implemented in full for the good of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Motion agreed.

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Lord Haskel) (Lab): My Lords, in view of the fact that we finished rather quickly, the Committee is adjourned for five minutes.

1.12 pm

Sitting suspended.

Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure (Security Requirements for Relevant Connectable Products) Regulations 2023

Considered in Grand Committee

1.15 pm

Moved by Viscount Camrose

That the Grand Committee do consider the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure (Security Requirements for Relevant Connectable Products) Regulations 2023

Relevant document: 48th Report from Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (Viscount Camrose) (Con): My Lords, these regulations were laid before the House on 10 July 2023, and they will be made under the powers provided by the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022 and the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020. They will mandate that the manufacturers of consumer connectable products made available to customers in the UK are, unless excepted, required to meet minimum security requirements.

In doing so, this instrument will complete the introduction of the UK's pioneering product security regime, established by Part 1 of the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022. Subject to noble Lords' approval, this regime will afford UK citizens and businesses with world-leading protections from the threats of cybercrime, as well as equipping the Government with the tools to ensure the long-term security of a vital component of the broader technology ecosystem.

Acting to secure consumer connectable products has never been more critical than it is now, as we cross the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution. Before our eyes, artificial intelligence is rewriting how we live our lives, how we deliver our priorities and the rules of entire industries. AI models are already an inextricable part of the connectable products we use every day, from the convolutional neural networks that recognise the photos of loved ones on our smartphones, to the

recurrent neural networks that allow our smart speakers to respond to our requests. The data collected through consumer devices is often also a vital part of a model's training set.

These regulations are therefore not just crucial if we are to protect our citizens and economy from the array of threats posed by consumer connectable products today but a vital step if we are to mitigate the risks, and therefore fully realise the benefits, of the AI-enabled economy of tomorrow. With the support of this House and Members of another place, this is precisely what the Government aim to achieve with these regulations.

The key provisions of this instrument are as follows. First, the regulations mandate that manufacturers comply with the security requirements set out in Schedule 1. These requirements were selected, following extensive consultation, because they are applicable across a broad range of devices and are commended by security experts as the most fundamental measures for addressing cyber risks to products and their users. This means that businesses will no longer be able to sell consumer smart products with universal default or easily guessable default passwords to UK customers. These passwords not only expose users to unacceptable risks of cyberattack but can also allow malicious actors to compromise products at scale, equipping them with the computing power to launch significantly disruptive cyberattacks.

Manufacturers will also be required to publish, in a manner that is accessible, clear and transparent, the details of a point of contact for the reporting of security vulnerabilities. It pains me to share that, despite our entrusting the security of our data, finances and even homes to the manufacturers of these products, as of 2022, less than one-third of global manufacturers had a policy for how they can be made aware of vulnerabilities. With your support, the UK aims to change that.

The final security requirement in this instrument will ensure that the minimum length of time for which a product will receive security updates is not just published but published in an accessible, clear and transparent manner. We know that consumers value security and consider it when purchasing products. Equipped with the vital information mandated by this requirement, UK consumers will be able to drive manufacturers to improve the security protections they offer through market forces.

We are confident, based on extensive policy development, consultation and advice from the National Cyber Security Centre, that these security requirements will make a fundamental difference to the security of products, their users and the wider connected technology ecosystem.

We also recognise the importance of cutting red tape or, better still, not introducing it in the first place. For this reason, Regulation 4 allows manufacturers that are already compliant with provisions in international standards equivalent to our security requirements to more readily demonstrate their compliance with our security requirements.

The instrument also sets out a list of products excepted from the scope of the product security regime. First, it excepts select product categories where made available for supply in Northern Ireland. This exception

ensures that the regime upholds the UK's international commitments under the EU withdrawal agreement, while extending the protections and benefits offered by the regime to consumers and businesses across the UK.

In addition, smart charge points, medical devices and smart metering devices are excepted to avoid double regulation and to ensure that these products are secured with the measures most appropriate to the particulars of their functions. This instrument also excepts laptops, desktop computers and tablets without a cellular connection from the regime's scope. Engagement with industry highlighted that the manufacturers of these products would face unique challenges in complying with this regime, and in many cases where these products are in use they are already subject to suitable cyber protections. It is therefore not clear at this stage that including these products in the regime's scope would be proportionate.

Finally, the regulations also contain uncontroversial administrative provisions, including provisions relating to statements of compliance. The regime will require that these documents accompany products, serving as an audit trail to enable compliance across the supply chain and to facilitate effective enforcement.

These regulations and the regime of which they are a part represent a victory for UK consumers. They are the first in the world to recognise that the public has a right to expect that the products available for them to purchase are secure. These measures solidify the United Kingdom's position at the forefront of the global cyber agenda, paving the way for other nations to follow in our footsteps. I commend the regulations to the Committee.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his introduction, which gave us the context for these regulations and the risks they are designed to mitigate and prevent. I agree with him about the importance of regulating in this area but, sadly—clearly—this is not box office today. We must live with that.

I welcome the regulations as far as they go. The one bright spot is that all regulations under the original Act, with one exception, are subject to the affirmative procedure, thanks to amendments put forward by us and accepted by the Government, which were designed to implement the recommendations of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. That we are discussing the regulations in this way is testimony to that.

However, the regulations do not go far enough, despite being described by the Minister as a “pioneering product security regime”. As I said at Third Reading of the original Bill, last October, we did not specify enough security requirements for IoT devices in primary legislation. There was a commitment to regulate for only the top three guidelines covered by the 2018 *Code of Practice for Consumer IoT Security*, namely: first, to prohibit the setting of universal default passwords and the ability to set weak or easily guessable passwords; secondly, to implement a vulnerability disclosure policy, requiring the production and maintenance by manufacturers of regularly publicly available reports

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]
of security vulnerabilities; and, thirdly, to keep software updated and ensure the provision of information to the consumer before the contract for sale or supply of a relevant connectable product detailing the minimum length of time for which they will receive software or other relevant updates for that product.

Those are now all in the regulations and I welcome that, but, sadly, many of the other guidelines were never going to be, and are not now, specifically covered in the regulations. Quite apart from the first three, there are a whole range of others: securely store credentials and security-sensitive data; communicate securely; minimise exposed attack surfaces; ensure software integrity; ensure that personal data is protected; make systems resilient to outages; monitor system telemetry data; make it easier for consumers to delete personal data; make the installation and maintenance of devices easy; and validate input data. All those are standards that should be adhered to in relation to these devices. Two of the guidelines that have not been made mandatory—ensure that personal data is protected, and make it easier for consumers to delete personal data—have been highlighted by Which? this very morning, which has produced research demonstrating that:

“Smart home device owners are being asked to provide swathes of data to manufacturers, which could compromise their privacy and potentially result in them handing their personal information to social media and marketing firms, Which? research has found”.

This is part of its press release.

“The consumer champion found companies appear to hoover up far more data than is needed for the product to function. This includes smart speakers and security cameras that share customer data with Meta and TikTok, smart TVs that insist on knowing users’ viewing habits and a smart washing machine that requires people’s date of birth. The research suggests that, despite consumers having already paid up to thousands of pounds for smart products, they are also having to ‘pay’ with their personal data”.

We need to make sure that the Government and the regulator, whether the ICO or others, are on the case in that respect.

Nor did we see any intention to introduce appropriate minimum periods for the provision of security updates and support, taking into account factors including the reasonable expectations of consumers, the type and purpose of the connectable products concerned and any other relevant considerations. During the passage of the Bill, the Government resisted that—unlike the EU, which has imposed a five-year mandatory minimum period in which products must receive security updates. So consumers in Northern Ireland, for instance, are going to be far better off as a result of the TCA and the Windsor agreement.

That has inevitably followed through into these disappointing regulations, but they are even more disappointing than previously anticipated. Online marketplaces are not covered. Why not? My noble friend Lord Fox tabled an amendment on Report that sought to probe whether online marketplaces would be covered, a question that I think we all agree is of great importance. My noble friend quoted a letter from the noble Lord, Lord Parkinson, dated 21 September 2022 stating that

“businesses need to comply with the security requirements of the product security regime in relation to all new consumer connectable products offered to customers in the UK, including those sold through online marketplaces”.

In response, the then Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Kamall, said:

“The Bill will ensure that where online marketplaces manufacture, import or sell products, they bear responsibility for the security of those products. Where this does not happen, I assure noble Lords that they should make no mistake: the regulator will act promptly to address serious risk from insecure products, and work closely with online marketplaces to ensure effective remedy”.

I accepted that assurance. I said:

“As regards the online marketplaces, I am grateful for those assurances, which are accepted and are very much in line with the letter”.—[*Official Report*, 12/10/22; cols. 794-95.]

That was the assurance that was given and accepted.

1.30 pm

However, in its briefing—I think that the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, has the same one as me; we are very grateful for the briefings we have been given—Which? says, and I totally agree:

“The PSTI Act allows the Government to place requirements on manufacturers, importers, and distributors”—

those last four words are underlined—

“of smart products. However, only manufacturers are affected by these regulations, and only those manufacturers who sell directly to consumers will be required to present information about a product’s support period to consumers at the point of sale. As such, consumers shopping for smart products through popular online retailers like Currys, Argos and John Lewis are not guaranteed to have the opportunity to see and consider support period information”.

That in itself is not satisfactory.

Which? goes on to say:

“We are concerned this discrepancy also weakens the pro-competitive effect of the regulations. Our stakeholder engagement has shown that leading manufacturers were expecting to benefit from greater transparency of their security support policies to consumers, but as this may not be showcased in retail environments it risks reducing a competitive advantage for manufacturers with the most consumer friendly policies. Without retailers showcasing this information and enabling consumers to discern between products with stronger or weaker support policies, manufacturers may be disincentivised from investing in robust support policies in future”.

I emphasise that that is from Which?, the major consumer champion—in effect, the progenitor of the IoT provisions in the original Bill, now an Act. Of course, Which? has been pursuing this agenda for quite some time; one can imagine the disappointment among its members and staff at this turn of events. Is not the failure to include online marketplaces a betrayal of the consumer?

In addition to those more, if you like, strategic questions, I have some slightly more detailed ones for the Minister. I want to ask about the impact of changing standards, referred to in paragraph 7.13 of the Explanatory Memorandum. It says:

“Regulation 4 provides that, where the conditions in Schedule 2 are met, a manufacturer is to be treated as having complied with a particular security requirement. These conditions relate to compliance with equivalent provisions to each requirement in appropriate international standards taken from either the EN, or ISO IEC 29147”.

I understand that and think that it a very sensible approach, but what happens when the standards change? Will we come back here? Will we have an affirmative resolution to discuss the new standards? What provisions

are made when those standards change and what process will be undertaken to review what is needed by way of new regulations?

Paragraph 7.19 of the Explanatory Memorandum talks about the Schedule 3 exemptions. It uses the same language as the Minister did: for computers, there are “unique challenges”. Can the Minister unpack that? I understand nearly all the other exemptions but we need to understand a bit more about what these unique challenges are rather than just taking it as a matter of faith that the poor old computer manufacturers are in trouble.

Finally, if we are to adopt new technology of this kind, much of which is beneficial, public trust in this area is absolutely crucial. I cannot think of anywhere where the use of data is more important. This is one of the huge gaps here. Do we really expect the ICO to have the resources to be able to oversee the use of data? I am rung on almost a weekly basis by my energy supplier to be asked, “Why aren’t you installing a smart meter?” I am resisting doing so, partly because I am not quite sure what use that data will have and who it will be shared with. I recognise that smart meters are probably a great idea for an energy company but I am not entirely convinced that it is for my individual consumer benefit. It would be marvellous if we had better regulation in that area. To me, that emphasises how important public trust in this area is.

These are tiny footsteps towards gaining trust for IoT devices. I pay tribute to all the work that UCL did in this area of research about what is needed for IoT devices, but we still have quite a long way to go.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister, as ever, and to the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, for his contribution. He had lots of questions, as ever, many the same as those we asked during the passage of the Bill.

The Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act creates a regime that has three purposes, which the Minister set out. They are to minimise default or easy-to-guess passwords, to maintain an awareness of security threats and publish contact information for use by consumers and owners, and to encourage greater transparency about how long the products covered by this legislation will receive security updates and support. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, that these are low-hanging fruit for regulation. We should look at this instrument as a small step in the right direction.

With that in our minds, we supported the PSTI Bill during its passage and, in common with other Members of the House, tabled and supported a number of amendments to go further than the Government wished.

The requirements being imposed on manufacturers are widely supported by consumer groups, although they are rightly very nervous and watchful of the direction in which the legislation takes us in terms of data. Questions are being asked about whether the standards are sufficient and what role, if any, distributors will have in improving consumer knowledge of security issues.

As discussed in a debate earlier this week, people’s habits with regard to data and the digital world have changed enormously over the past few years. This includes the rapid take-up of smart and connectable

devices, such as smart speakers, CCTV doorbells and so on. These products are highly desirable, and yet research has demonstrated that many contain significant security vulnerabilities and that consumers are generally not aware of the risks that they face.

A policy commitment was made back in January 2020 and the Bill was passed in December 2022, so why will the new regime come into force only by April next year? We understand the need for technical details to be worked through and for manufacturers to adjust their own systems, but could the Government not have moved more quickly than this? This is a fast-moving market, after all.

We supported the passage of the Bill and, as I said, worked with colleagues across the House to push the Government to be more ambitious about the regime’s scope and the security standards that should be met by manufacturers, but it seems that Ministers refused to raise the bar and continue to do so.

As the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, said, Which? and others have noted that, while the Act allows the Government to place requirements on manufacturers, importers and distributors, these regulations cover only manufacturers. Is the hope that distributors and retailers will pass security information on to consumers voluntarily or is the department looking at other tailored requirements for them? If the latter, how long might this take? Perhaps the Minister could elucidate that.

It seems that every day we hear of another major hack or data breach. Some are used to defraud victims, while others harness networks of smart devices to launch attacks on major websites. Sadly, these dangers are likely only to grow, as we discovered in recent weeks, so it is vital that the Government keep their foot on the gas on these issues, rather than passing these regulations and considering them job done. There is much more to do.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, I draw attention to the Which? briefing paper, reflected in a *Guardian* article today, which suggests that manufacturers may be using these devices to collect more data than the legislation seemingly enables, which is shocking. Asking for postcodes and date-of-birth data seems outwith the manufacturers’ immediate needs. Can the Minister throw some light on this issue? What are the Government’s intentions regarding it and how do they intend to address it? These issues of data retention and use are serious. They affect consumer behaviour, confidence and trust, and trust is a terribly important commodity in today’s world. I hope the Minister can answer those questions.

I am rather with the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, on smart meters. We have one; it is a scary device, and it has become scarier in the last year as the bills have gone up. I am not sure of its value but my wife tells me it is an invaluable tool. I hope that is the case, that we can get better and more confident about the data that these things produce, and that they are in the service of the consumer rather than of the manufacturer, because that is really where we should be coming from.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I thank the crowds of noble Lords for their valuable contributions to the debate. I will make some general comments to start and then come to specific points that noble Lords have made.

[VISCOUNT CAMROSE]

Consumers assume that if a product is for sale it is secure, but too often—I think we are in agreement on this—that is not the case. Many consumers are at risk of cyberattacks, theft, fraud and even physical danger. These regulations will change that, ensuring that protections are implemented for our commonly used items such as smartphones, smartwatches and smart baby monitors, as well as the UK citizens and businesses that use them.

Cybercrime is thought to cost the UK billions of pounds every year, with one report by Detica and the Cabinet Office estimating the total cost at £27 billion a year. In 2020-21 the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau reported receiving over 30,000 reports of cybercrime, resulting in estimated losses of £9.6 million for the victims. Cybercrime is on the rise, and vulnerable internet-of-things products are a key attack vector for criminals. This instrument is an essential step in fighting the dangers of cyber risks.

While the product security regime will come into effect only next April, with the support of this House, I want to take this opportunity to reflect on how far we have come on this agenda. The development of the regime has been supported by a huge range of officials but I extend particular thanks to Peter Stephens, Jasper Pandza, Veena Dholiwar, Maria Bormaliyska, Jonathan Angwin, Warda Hassan, Howard Cheng and Eilidh Tickle for their dedicated and diligent advice.

I thank all experts who have contributed to delivering this regime since 2016. Among them stands Professor David Rogers, to whom I pay particular thanks for his leading role in developing the *Code of Practice for Consumer IoT Security* on which the security requirements of this instrument are based. Lastly, I too thank Which? for being a champion of consumer security, and for holding the Government to account throughout the process of delivering these important measures and on this agenda more broadly.

I shall now respond to the questions that have been asked. On the topic of why the security baseline does not go further, a matter raised by both noble Lords, we do not believe at this stage that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that mandating security requirements beyond the initial baseline would be appropriate. Specifically, we do not currently consider it appropriate to mandate minimum security-update periods for relevant connectable products before the impact of the initial security requirements is known. Governments mandating necessarily broad regulation across a sector as inherently complex as technology security will always run the risk of imposing obligations on businesses that are disproportionate to the associated security benefits or of leaving citizens exposed to cyber threats.

However, the Government agree that, for a number of consumer connectable product verticals, implementation of the three security requirements alone would not be sufficient. Legislation, however, is not the only incentive driving the security practices adopted by tech manufacturers. Evidence suggests that consumers value and consider the security of a product when making purchasing decisions, but assume that products available for them to purchase will not expose them to avoidable security risks.

In ensuring that manufacturers are transparent with UK consumers about how a product's security will be maintained, we expect the product security regime to incentivise improved standards of cybersecurity beyond the initial three requirements. The Government will closely monitor the impact of the initial security requirements on standards of cybersecurity across the sector, and will not hesitate to mandate further requirements using the powers provided by the parent Act if necessary.

1.45 pm

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): The Minister has moved on from talking about periods of assurance for consumers. I mentioned the EU introducing its five-year rule and the Northern Ireland aspect. That is rather useful for the Government to be able to see the impact of putting down a marker on a five-year period, because there is no alternative under the TCA and the Windsor agreement. Will the Government undertake to review how it is working in Northern Ireland? If it is working well and they think it is practical, will they introduce it across the UK?

Viscount Camrose (Con): That is an interesting experimental chamber to have, because we can compare the two regimes, so I am happy to make that commitment, yes.

The assurances about online marketplaces from my noble friends Lord Kamall and Lord Parkinson remain true. Products sold through online marketplaces are subject to the same requirements as all other products. No regulation is perfect and, if relevant parties do not comply, the parent Act empowers the Secretary of State, or those whom the Secretary of State has authorised to carry out enforcement functions, with robust powers to address non-compliance, including monitoring the market, warning consumers of risks and, where appropriate, seizing products and recalling products from customers.

The Government have made it clear that they expect online marketplaces to do more to keep unsafe products off their platforms, and are conducting a review of the product safety framework. The product safety review consultation is open until 24 October. Following this, we will review and analyse stakeholder feedback and publish a government response. Any legislation will be brought forward in line with parliamentary procedures and timetables, which will include proposals to tackle the sale of unsafe products online. Officials will continue—

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): I apologise to the Minister, but what is the reason for having two separate processes for manufacturers and online distributors? The assurance that I quoted could not have been clearer, and we all thought that these regulations would include not only manufacturers but online distributors. It still baffles me and I am sure it baffles the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, as well. The logic of doing it in two separate tranches entirely escapes me.

Viscount Camrose (Con): The processes we have put here resulted from extensive consultation with the stakeholders, both the manufacturers and the retailers.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): So the Minister is saying that the retailers did not like it, did not have the systems required and could not do things quickly enough—despite the fact that some time has elapsed, as the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, mentioned—so they said, “Not now, Josephine”, basically.

Viscount Camrose (Con): No, the consultation took place with a wide range of civil society and other stakeholders. Mechanisms are in place to update, should it not prove to be as proportionate as we believe it is. The Government are also engaging directly with online marketplaces to explore how they can complement the product security regime and further protect consumers.

On the question of how the regime accounts for the possibility of changing international standards, the instrument references specific versions of ETSI EN 303 645 and ISO/IEC 29147. Were the standards to be updated, the version cited would still be the applicable conditions in Regulation 2. Noble Lords should rest assured that any action by the Government to update the standards referenced in the regime would require further parliamentary scrutiny.

Turning to computers, we do not have evidence that including such products in the scope of the regime would significantly reduce security risk. There is a mature anti-virus software market that empowers customers to secure their own devices. Alongside this, mainstream operating system vendors already include security features in their services. The result is that they are not subject to the same level of risk as other consumer devices.

On smart meters and data, the smart metering product market is already regulated through the Gas Act 1986, the Electricity Act 1989 and the *Smart Energy Code*. Smart metering products are subject to tailored cyber requirements that reflect their specific risk profile. This exception ensures that smart meter products are not subject to double regulation without compromising their security.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): The Minister has referenced two pieces of legislation which almost—this is perhaps going a bit far—predate the digital age. Is he saying that those are fit for purpose, given that much has changed since 1986, to cite one of the dates he gave, and subsequent pieces of legislation? Are they right for what we are doing now?

Viscount Camrose (Con): I have to confess that my familiarity with some of that legislation is a bit limited, but I was attempting to convey that the full extent of the regulation covering those devices is collectively included in those three instruments. I recognise that that is not a wholly satisfactory answer, so I am very happy to write to the noble Lord. That legislation mandates compliance with the code collectively, which is kept up to date and includes robust modern cyber requirements. The UK already has a robust framework for data protection. While I absolutely agree that it is important, it is not the subject of these regulations.

I would like to return to a matter that I addressed earlier and point out that the cyber resilience Act that the noble Lord mentioned will in fact not, as per the current agreed version of the Windsor Framework,

come into effect in Northern Ireland. The point remains that we will monitor its impact on the continent. I beg his pardon for not being clear about that.

Turning to the matters raised by the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, we agree that the challenges posed by inadequate consumer connectable product security require urgent action. However, regulating a sector as heterogeneous as connectable technology in its diversity of devices, user cases, threat profiles and extant regulation also requires careful consideration. We feel that we have acted as quickly as was appropriate, and in doing so we acted before any other nation.

On the role of distributors in communicating the defined support period to customers, products made available to consumers in the UK, or those made available to businesses but identical to those made available to consumers, are required to be accompanied by a statement of compliance, which will contain information about the minimum security update period for the product. Retailers are in fact required to ensure that the statement of compliance accompanies their product.

In addition, the SI requires manufacturers to publish information about the minimum security update periods, alongside invitations to purchase the product where certain conditions are met. The Government have no immediate plans to make it mandatory for the distributors of these products to publicise the defined support period. However, we encourage distributors to take this action voluntarily. If the manufacturer fails to publish the defined support period, the enforcement authority can issue notices demanding that the manufacturer make the necessary corrections, or demand that importers or distributors stop selling the product. It can also seize products and recall them from end users.

We will of course be monitoring the effectiveness of the product security regime when it comes into effect. If evidence emerges suggesting that further action to ensure the availability of the defined support period at points of purchase would be appropriate to enhance and protect the security of products and their users, the PSTI product security regime empowers Ministers to take such action.

In conclusion, I hope noble Lords will recognise the benefits that this regime will bring to the UK public and its ground-breaking influence on the world stage.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): Before the Minister sits down, I wonder whether he could return to his notes on the cyber resilience Act. I heard what he said but it may have been a slip of the tongue because he said that it has not yet come into effect but we will monitor its impact on the continent. I think—at least, I assume—that he meant we will monitor its impact when it comes into effect in Northern Ireland. It will inevitably come into effect into Northern Ireland, will it not?

Viscount Camrose (Con): I think we are talking about the continent.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): Perhaps the Minister could write to me or to us. The fact, as I understand it, is that the Act is a piece of EU legislation that is going to come into effect across the EU under the Windsor agreement and the TCA. Northern Ireland is subject

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]
to EU legislation of that kind; it will therefore come into effect in Northern Ireland and we will be able to monitor its impact there. So, it is not just a question of monitoring its impact on the continent. We have a homegrown example of how it will be implemented—a test bed.

Viscount Camrose (Con): I do not want to say anything inaccurate. I hope that it is acceptable for me to write to the noble Lord.

Motion agreed.

Committee adjourned at 1.56 pm.

