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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

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 25 July 2024

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Winchester.

Oaths and Affirmations

11.06 am

Lord Blair of Boughton took the oath and Lord Lupton made the solemn affirmation, and both signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Ministry of Defence: Expenditure

Question

11.07 am

Asked by Baroness Goldie

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have made any decisions to pause expenditure on Ministry of Defence programmes; and, if so, on which programmes.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Coaker) (Lab): Work continues on our programmes within existing allocated funding as the strategic review progresses. This review will consider the threats Britain faces, the capabilities needed to meet them, the state of the UK Armed Forces and the resources available. It will set out a deliverable and affordable plan for defence.

Baroness Goldie (Con): I thank the Minister and congratulate him on his appointment, and welcome him to the Front Bench. My Question was predicated on an already stretched defence budget and government opaqueness about the future. The commitment to spend 2.5% of GDP is very welcome, but we do not know when—it is jam for an uncertain tomorrow. The Leader of the House, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Basildon, said to this Chamber on Tuesday evening, referring to the strategic defence review, expected to report early next year, that it

“will inform how the amount is reached”.—[*Official Report*, 23/7/24; col. 424.]

The noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is deserving of much admiration, but his expertise is defence, not macroeconomics and certainly not Treasury fiscal wizardry. This is the Government's most important responsibility; we have to stop pussyfooting around. How can there be any informed strategic defence review when the chief reviewer has not been told what the budget he is working on is?

Lord Coaker (Lab): I thank the noble Baroness for her welcome to the post; it is an honour to follow her, as well as the noble Earl, Lord Minto. We have made a clear commitment to 2.5%, and the timetable for that will be announced at a future fiscal event. Alongside that, as the noble Baroness will know, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is conducting the review. As we think is important, the noble Lord will come forward with the capabilities needed to meet the threats of the

future, and then we will know what we should be spending the money on, rather than just flying blind, without any idea as to the threats we will face and the capabilities needed to meet them.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): On a much narrower point, where do we stand on the order for the fleet solid support ships, bearing in mind the dreadful financial position of Harland & Wolff?

Lord Coaker (Lab): The noble Lord will know that the situation with respect to the Belfast shipyard and Harland & Wolff is a difficult one. Our expectation is that those ships will be able to be built. Clearly, the company is looking for a private sector business to support it, and we will look to do what we can to support it in that.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, is the Minister able to reassure the House, and perhaps the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, that this is intended to be a defence-led review, not a Treasury-led review? If the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, and his colleagues in the review find that expenditure needs to be not a vague 2.5% at a certain point but 3% or more, would His Majesty's Government be willing to spend whatever is necessary?

Lord Coaker (Lab): I thank the noble Baroness for her question. I think she slightly gets in front of herself. We have made a commitment to 2.5%, and that is a cast-iron guarantee. The noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is in his place and has heard the points she has made. We look forward to a deliverable, affordable plan that will meet the threats we will face in the future—not the threats now or in the past, but in the future. That is why the review of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is so important. The money that we spend has to be spent to deliver the capabilities needed to meet those threats. That is the fundamental principle that underlies what we are doing, and it will be maintained.

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, we are still awaiting the outcome of the review, and in the light of the undoubted financial pressures it faces, can the Minister assure the House that his department will not view as easy options for in-year savings levels of training upon which military capability so crucially depends, and the adequate maintenance of infrastructure, which is already in a poor condition and is an important factor in the retention of experienced personnel?

Lord Coaker (Lab): The noble and gallant Lord makes an important point. Of course there are competing pressures on any budget, whatever its size, but infrastructure—the hangars, runways and accommodation—is an important consideration. He also makes a point about the level of skills training. He will know, as will many Members in this House, that there are serious skills shortages in all the Armed Forces, and we face a challenge to meet the requirements we have because of that skills shortage. Skills training, accommodation and infrastructure will play an important part in any review that the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, conducts.

Lord Swire (Con): My Lords, the Minister does his job extremely well. Can he clarify whether the Government are still fully behind the Storm Shadow missile programme? Will he use this opportunity to clarify whether those Storm Shadow missiles will be deployable within Russia?

Lord Coaker (Lab): We are of course committed to the Storm Shadow programme. As the Prime Minister has made clear, under Article 51 of the UN charter Ukraine has a clear right of self-defence against Russia's illegal attacks. That does not preclude striking military targets inside Russia, provided strikes comply with the law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law. As the Prime Minister said, it would be inappropriate to go into the operational detail of how Ukraine uses UK-provided systems. I should say to the noble Lord that that is exactly the same policy that the previous Government pursued.

Lord Watts (Lab): My Lords, is it not the case that we need a proper plan so that we do not end up having aircraft carriers without planes? Is it not about time that we plan for the future, rather than wait for it to happen?

Lord Coaker (Lab): I thank my noble friend for his important question. Whether it is aircraft carriers and planes, the number of soldiers, technology or other capabilities, you have to have the capability you need to meet the threat that you face. My noble friend is right to point that out. That is the fundamental principle that underlies the review of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, and why he will be working closely with others. I say to all noble Lords that it is an open review and anyone is welcome to contribute to it.

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): Does the Minister agree that, at this moment, the Government should remain open-minded on all areas of discretionary defence spending that do not directly contribute to keeping Ukraine in the fight and restoring the credibility of deterrence in Europe?

Lord Coaker (Lab): Of course we should remain open to any capability that is necessary. The noble and gallant Lord makes a very important point. We are open to all these considerations and factors in the defence of Ukraine, but also in the wider security picture that we face across the globe. No doubt that will be something that the review takes forward. I would welcome the noble and gallant Lord's contribution to that review, to make the very point that he has just made.

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Con): My Lords, I declare my interest as director of the Army Reserve. The Public Accounts Committee identified a black hole of some £16.9 billion in our capital programme. That sounds a lot, but over 10 years it is actually less than 5% of the programme and manageable. However, as night follows day, there will be deferrals or cancellations of capital projects within the MoD. Normally, it is the smaller, short-term projects that are deferred or cancelled, as opposed to larger, long-term projects. In order to meet the Chief of the General Staff's aim of doubling

the lethality of the British Army in the next three years, it is these very short-term, small projects that are required. When it comes to the balance of investments, will this desire be taken into account?

Lord Coaker (Lab): I thank the noble Lord for his question and for all the work he does in his position outside this House. He makes an important point. For me, it is not whether it is a small capital project or a large capital project; the important point is how it contributes to the lethality of our forces and how it contributes to us defending not only our country but freedom and democracy across the world. Whether it is a small project, a medium-sized project or a large project, its utility should be decided on that basis. The noble Lord makes a very important point, and I will make sure it is taken into consideration.

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, the change of Government has already resulted in a delay to the announcement of the location of the joint government headquarters for the trilateral British, Japanese and Italian fighter jet project, GCAP. Is it true that this project is now dependent on the result of the strategic defence review, or has the Minister been able to give reassurance to the visitors at the Farnborough airshow this week, including the Japanese Defence Minister, that it will go ahead regardless?

Lord Coaker (Lab): The noble Lord will have heard what I said. Not only did I give reassurance to Italy and Japan and our defence companies at Farnborough, I hosted a reception for all those partners last night in your Lordships' House. It was very well received. We reassured people that work continues on that project, alongside the fact that the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is conducting a review that will look at the defence programme across the piece. They were very pleased with what I had to say, and I spent my time reassuring them, here in your Lordships' House.

Government Standards

Question

11.18 am

Asked by **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town**

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve confidence in government and to ensure Ministers are held to a high standard.

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Smith of Basildon) (Lab): My Lord, as the Prime Minister has made clear, public service is a privilege, and this Government are committed to ensuring that politics can be a force for good. It was at the very first Cabinet meeting that the Prime Minister was clear about the standards he expects from all of us and our ministerial teams. The Prime Minister will issue a ministerial code in due course to set out the standards of behaviour expected by Ministers. It might be helpful to the House if I let it know that the Prime Minister met Sir Laurie Magnus on his first day in office and that the Government are committed to appropriately empowering the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests and establishing an ethics and integrity commission.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): I thank my noble friend for her Answer. It is a great pleasure to be able to put questions to her. Given the importance of transparency in increasing public confidence and enabling the monitoring of ministerial actions, will she ensure, confidentiality apart, that ministerial decisions, such as public appointments, the award of contracts and meetings with in-house lobbyists, are open, transferable and easily available?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My noble friend has put a number of those questions to me over the years, given her interests and experience on this subject. She is right: public confidence can be improved by our being open and transparent about the decisions being taken. I can tell her that there are systems in place to ensure transparency around many of the issues that she mentions, but there is often a concern that they are not working as well as they could. As a first step, the Government have to ensure that they work better, including information being published on time but in a way that is easy to access and easy to understand. The ethics and integrity commission could look at this issue.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, practice matters as well as principles and regulations here. In terms of ministerial practice, will the new Government try their best to ensure that Ministers stay in office for at least two years each, rather than using constant ministerial reshuffles as a matter of party management? Can we also ensure that Ministers show us that government is not constant campaigning? There should be occasional weeks when neither the Prime Minister nor any other Ministers are shown in the press in fluorescent jackets running around offices rather than providing good government for the country?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, the entire Front Bench endorses the noble Lord's comment and wants to stay in office. One problem of publishing information on a quarterly basis is that, in the last few years, by the time we got to the end of a quarter the Minister had gone and someone else was in place. There is a serious issue about continuity in office. As for fluorescent jackets, with a Government who are committed to infrastructure improvements in this country we may see some fluorescent jackets being worn, but the noble Lord makes an important point. Governance is a serious issue. We have seen that, because of election campaigning, political decisions that would be difficult for any Government, such as the issue of prisons that we have had to consider, have been delayed when they should have been taken in the interests of the country. I give the noble Lord a categorical assurance that we will act in the interests of the country, will not put off decisions because they are difficult but will take them when we have to, and will report back to your Lordships' House.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the Minister and her team, who have got off to a good start in performing their ministerial tasks in this House. On the subject of this Question, I ask her to give me an assurance. What was happening under the previous Government and has got worse

and worse is that we did not get proper answers to Questions, both Written and Oral, and the time taken to get replies from government departments became quite ridiculous. Will she make it her business to ensure proper accountability by ensuring that that is no longer the case?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, I say to the noble Lord that I will do my utmost on that. He and I have discussed this before, and all Ministers are aware that their priority is to your Lordships' House, reporting back to it and answering questions in a way that is concise but also gives the information that is required. If there are problems as we get going then we will look into those, but we will do our utmost to always respond in good time to every Member of your Lordships' House.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, there is a terrible temptation to go through all the indiscretions of the Ministers of the last Government, but Boris Johnson's alone would take up the whole of this Question Time so I shall deal with the allocations to the Covid VIP lane. We have at last agreed to set up a Covid corruption commissioner, and I hope he or she will look into this matter as quickly as possible. Can the Leader of the House give us an indication as to when the commissioner will be appointed? It should be as quickly as possible.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): Having just promised to give full answers, I do not have a full answer for my noble friend. I will look into that and come back to it, but we want to get moving on issues like this as quickly as possible. In his first speech in Downing Street, the Prime Minister said we have to prove to people that we will do things differently and do things well. It is not about saying something but about how we act—and how we act in getting to the bottom of some of the issues that have caused enormous concern is very important. I assure him we will do that as quickly as possible.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that one of the most serious problems we face in many areas of government has been groupthink? Does she agree that Parliament benefits from a wide range of experience of Members, both in our debates and in our committees? Does she further agree that any new rules on propriety or ethics—for example, on second jobs in either House—need to avoid discouraging informed and expert contribution so that we get different perspectives coming together in the public interest?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): Of course. It is a given that for good decision-making it is necessary to have good input from different sources. I am unclear why the noble Baroness asked that; I would have thought it was an automatic requisite of good decision-making.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB): Should the House of Lords Appointments Commission be given teeth so as always to have appropriate people as Members of the House?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): The question of what powers the House of Lords Appointments Commission should have is a balance. We have discussed that in this House many times, and my view is on record, and the Prime Minister will set out his views on the House of Lords Appointments Commission soon. We want to ensure that the commission is listened to. There is only one instance in history where a Prime Minister has overruled the recommendation of the Appointments Commission, which I found extraordinary, but it is an advisory body. I would like to see it look at a range of issues, as we have discussed before. We all want to ensure the integrity of this House, and Members who join the House want to play a full part in our work.

Lord McLoughlin (Con): My Lords, the general election had a low turnout. The Government's task in fulfilling what the Leader has just said is fundamental in reassuring the British public that their views matter, and that may be a way in which we see an increase in turnout at elections. Would she agree?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): The noble Lord has a point. Too often, as we see in the media, people wish to denigrate politics and politicians. The Prime Minister has said he wants to show—not say, but show—that politics can be a force for good. That is down to all of us, here in this House and in the other place, in how we behave. The noble Lord is right that, if people see politicians behaving in the right way and we show it in our actions, not just our words, then they will have more confidence, and I hope we will see a greater turnout in general and local elections.

Lord Watts (Lab): My Lords, this House is dominated by people from London and the south-east. Are the Government planning to make this House more representative by including more Members from the north?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): Not just the north but from the whole of the country—the nations and regions, including Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland; there is a role for people from every region in the House. In the longer term, the Government have plans to consult the public and try to reach a consensus on how we better represent the country as a whole. In the short term, it is up to all party leaders as they nominate people to look at how we get a better, more representative House. That is one of the things we are we discussing.

Lord McDonald of Salford (CB): My Lords, in less than two years as Prime Minister, Mr Sunak had 11 political honours lists. Previously, the average since the 1980s was 1.3 lists. Does the Leader of the House accept that fewer political honours lists would be one way to restore some confidence in government?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, it is not lost on these Benches that even the Cross-Benchers have had more appointments than we have had on the political list for this side of the House. As I have said before, I would like to see a smaller House where there is greater balance across the whole House. It is helpful when the main opposition party and the government

party are roughly the same size. I hasten to add that that is not an invitation to write to me suggesting that they could serve on the Labour Benches—I do not want the size of the House to increase—but one of the problems under the last Government is that they had so many resignation honours lists that our appointments kept increasing, again and again. I want to see some balance. I want to see Members—just like Members of the House today—with a contribution to make and who want to see the House do its work in the best way possible. That should be the priority for new lists of people coming to your Lordships' House.

Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law Question

11.29 am

Asked by **Baroness Chakrabarti**

To ask His Majesty's Government, in the light of threats to fundamental rights and the rule of law, what plans they have to promote greater public information and education in this area.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, with the caveat that the word “eater” on today's list should read “greater”, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede) (Lab): My Lords, as the Prime Minister has made clear, the UK is unequivocally committed to the European Convention on Human Rights. My right honourable friend the Lord Chancellor has said she will champion the rule of law at home and abroad, and my noble and learned friend the Attorney-General has described it as our lodestar. We are committed to rebuilding public trust in our political system by explaining how the rule of law serves us all and by promoting human rights as British values.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): I am grateful to my noble friend the Minister—it is very nice to be able to say that—for that Answer. The Human Rights Act 1998 was a wonderful innovation: a modern bill of rights for this country. There was very little public education and information to go with it, and that has made it vulnerable to attack and misrepresentation, including from allegedly moderate Conservative leadership candidates, even today. Will the Government therefore now use this second opportunity and every resource available, digital and otherwise, in government, to put things right?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): I thank my noble friend for that question. We consider that the UK's three national human rights institutions, each with specific jurisdictions and functions, have a role in this. They are the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. Each has an “A” status, as rated by the UN, and a role in promoting human rights and awareness of human rights within the United Kingdom.

My noble friend's original Question went wider than that, to include reinvigorating an appreciation of human rights. While the bodies I have just described have a statutory responsibility, there is nothing to stop central government doing that as well. As I think I pointed out in my initial Answer, both the Lord Chancellor and Attorney-General take this matter extremely seriously and see it as central to what they are doing.

My noble friend also referred to today's press reports. Tom Tugendhat MP said in his pitch to be leader of the Conservative Party that he is ready to leave the ECHR. That is in marked contrast to what the leadership of the Government are saying.

Lord Oates (LD): My Lords, does the Minister agree that respect for human rights and the rule of law are key pillars of any free society, both at home and abroad? The Government will be aware of the brutal arrest and detention of Zimbabwe opposition leader Jameson Timba and 78 of his supporters, including a mother with a one year-old child. They have now been detained for 39 days in appalling conditions and denied their constitutional right to bail by a captured judiciary. Will the Minister make it clear that the new Government stand with all people standing up for their fundamental rights? Will he ask his ministerial colleagues to convey this message strongly to the Government of Zimbabwe?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): I thank the noble Lord for his question. I am not sighted on that issue, but I will absolutely take up his suggestion that the relevant Ministers make clear their position regarding the importance of human rights in all parts of the world, and in the example he gave as well.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, the noble Lord will know that the House of Commons has accused the Chinese Communist Party of genocide in Xinjiang against the Uighur Muslim population. He will also know that the health of 76 year-old British national Jimmy Lai, who is being kept in a cell along with 1,800 other political prisoners, is deteriorating. What is the Government's view on the continued presence of British judges dignifying the courts of Hong Kong?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): I thank the noble Lord for that question. Hong Kong is a friend of ours, and this means we can have a frank exchange of views on human rights matters, which the Government continue to do. The noble Lord raised a specific question about Jimmy Lai and the other prisoners detained in Hong Kong. I will make sure that that is brought to the attention of my noble friend Lord Collins, who is directly responsible for these matters. If necessary, he will write to the noble Lord.

Lord Lexden (Con): My Lords, have the Government been advised to establish whether it is compatible with the European convention to slap VAT on independent school fees? The noble Lord, Lord Pannick, does not believe it is.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): The advice we have received is that it is within the law, and we have every intention of carrying it out as soon as is practicable.

Lord Keen of Elie (Con): My Lords, Michael Forst, the UN special rapporteur on environmental defenders, recently displayed a profound ignorance of the rule of law when he suggested that the Government should intervene with the judiciary over the legitimate and necessary sentences passed on the M25 Just Stop Oil conspirators. Will the Minister take steps to educate the rapporteur about the application of the rule of law and the separation of powers in the United Kingdom?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, of course it is for judges to sentence as they see fit within sentencing guidelines—whichever case it is. It is important that peaceful protest is a vital part of our democratic society. It is a long-standing tradition in this country that people are free to demonstrate as they want, as long as they do it peacefully and within the law. But there is a balance to be struck. The rights of protestors must be weighed against the rights of others to carry out their daily activities without fear of intimidation or significant disruption. Peaceful protest does not include violent or threatening behaviour, and the police have the power to address this, as they have done.

Baroness Whitaker (Lab): My Lords, I am delighted to congratulate my noble friend on his role. Will he recognise the role in human rights of non-statutory bodies such as the British Institute of Human Rights? I declare my interest as an advisory board member. It trains many public servants in how to implement equality and human rights legislation. Will he also note that there is a certain absence of teaching human rights in schools? We do not have a written constitution, like the Gettysburg Address, which can be easily communicated to young people, so we should do more to let them know what rights actually consist of.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): I agree with my noble friend. There is an absence of teaching civic rights in our schools, and we could do more on this. Given the new focus on and enthusiasm for human rights, the various non-governmental bodies to which she has referred can play a greater role in promoting human rights in our society.

Lord Carter of Haslemere (CB): My Lords, the Independent Human Rights Act review of 2021, led by Sir Peter Gross, recommended a programme of civic and constitutional education in our schools and universities. Does the Minister agree that this is essential to ensure that our human rights framework develops to meet the needs of society?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): Yes, I think I do agree with the noble Lord, Lord Carter. I spoke to Sir Peter Gross about this a number of years ago, and I will make essentially the same point that I have made in answering other questions from noble friends. There is a role for greater promotion within our schools, and that should be seriously looked at.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, in a speech to the Institute for Government on 10 July 2023, the then Attorney-General said:

[BARONESS BENNETT OF MANOR CASTLE]

“Laws should be accessible, intelligible, clear, and predictable”.

The last two questions have referred to the difficulty and lack of understanding of the UK’s constitutional arrangements. Our constitution, accreted by centuries of historical accident, fails to fit the criteria the Attorney-General set out. Are the Government prepared to set out a path towards a modern, democratic, functional written constitution?

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): I think the short answer to that is no. The accretion of laws the noble Baroness refers to is the common law system. She is shaking her head, but that is an accretion of laws over centuries. All the lawyers I have spoken to are very proud of it and think it a flexible system. Many times, it is a better way of dealing with changing circumstances than primary legislation. We want to keep that flexibility in our current arrangements.

Global IT Outage Question

11.39 am

Asked by **Lord Harris of Haringey**

To ask His Majesty’s Government what assessment they have made of the recent global IT outage.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords, in begging leave to ask the Question standing in my name, I refer to my interests as an adviser to Performanta and as chair of the National Preparedness Commission.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Twycross) (Lab): The CrowdStrike software update caused an IT outage affecting millions of devices around the world. In the UK, while government emergency and security systems remained operational, our retail, transport and healthcare sectors were disrupted. I have huge sympathy for all those affected. COBRA officials’ meetings were convened and officials from across government and the devolved Administrations met throughout to monitor impacts and recovery and to update Ministers as appropriate. UK sectors have now returned to normal operations, and the Cabinet Office will work with partners to review the lessons learned.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend for that reply. It highlights the vulnerability of all the systems on which the public and the private sectors rely, and how much they depend on the software and so on. Software manufacture is largely unregulated. Can the Government look at how they can strengthen the requirements for software providers to ensure the safety and security of what they supply to the public and private sectors? At the same time, will the Government remind all operators that they should plan for failure and for when something does not work? What are their back-up arrangements in the event of their software failing?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I thank my noble friend for that question and for his huge support for me in my previous role as chair of the London Resilience

Forum. Although the outage is not assessed to be a security incident or cyberattack, the issues that he raises will be covered in the cybersecurity and resilience Bill included in the King’s Speech. This will strengthen our defences and ensure that more essential digital services than ever before are protected. For example, it will look at expanding the remit of the existing regulation, putting regulators on a stronger footing and increasing the reporting requirements to build a better picture in government of cyber threats.

Lord Bellingham (Con): My Lords, among the companies most adversely affected in this country were airlines. Many thousands of passengers were hugely inconvenienced. How should they be compensated, and should CrowdStrike be held accountable?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I think we all have huge sympathy for those affected. As the noble Lord rightly says, thousands of people were affected on the day. However, compensation is a matter for the individual operators and subject to consumer rules, which would cover any entitlement to compensation or refunds.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, in the light of recent events, we are clearly talking not just about bad actors. Does the Minister agree that there needs to be a rethink about critical national infrastructure and our dependence on a few overly dominant major tech companies for cloud services and software, which are now effectively essential public utilities? Will the Government reconsider how we are wholesale replacing reliable analogue communications with digital systems without any back-up?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): The noble Lord raises critical issues, a number of which will be covered by the cybersecurity and resilience Bill. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with him further.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I warmly welcome the noble Baroness to her new role and look forward to working with her on the Bill she mentioned. This serious incident affected operations not only in the UK but right around the world. It appears that the system we had set up—co-ordination, monitoring, business continuity and back-up, which we heard about from the noble Lord, Lord Harris—worked well. Does the Minister agree that this area is about defending national assets and is likely to be increasingly important as the cyber and tech threat grows? Should it not therefore be a government priority?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I thank the noble Baroness for her question and her openness and engagement with me when she was a Minister. Her passion for improving resilience was clear in how she carried out the role. This is definitely a central concern of the incoming Government, which is why we introduced the cybersecurity and resilience Bill in the King’s Speech. I look forward to discussing that further with her and other noble Lords from around the House as it progresses through the legislative process.

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): My Lords, as the Government continue to consider the issues arising from this serious outage, I invite my noble friend the

Minister to consider seriously the reports issued by the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, of which I have been a member, which deal with issues such as ransomware, against which the software was designed to protect us. These issues will only become more important in the years ahead.

Baroness Twycross (Lab): My noble friend raises similar points to other noble Lords; Members across the House are quite rightly concerned about this. As part of the process of developing and taking the cybersecurity and resilience Bill through this House and the other place, all learning from a range of reviews, including some of the public inquiries that have reported and are yet to report, will be key to improving our country's resilience.

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, I welcome the noble Baroness to her place and will pick up on a point made by the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones. The noble Baroness is right to say that millions of devices throughout the country were affected, but they were, as I understand it, all devices using the Microsoft operating system. Is it not the case that the dominance that the Microsoft operating system has achieved in this country, reinforced by cautious corporate IT managers who always recommend it, has potentially become a threat to our security? I hope the Government are able to recommend that the Competition Commission or some other competent authority should look at this, with a view to reducing the dominance of Microsoft and increasing our resilience.

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I thank the noble Lord for his question, which packed a lot in. I agree that the dominance of any particular software company or IT system is a risk to resilience, as government has known for some time. But we need to look at this as a whole and—I do not want to sound like a broken record—this will be covered by the cybersecurity and resilience Bill as it proceeds through the House.

Lord Scriven (LD): My Lords, one of the public services specifically hit was the NHS, so why are systematic back-up systems not in place in the NHS for primary care and pharmacy? Who has been asked to take this forward to ensure that such systems are in place as a matter of urgency for those who are ill?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): All relevant departments will take part in the review, and I will feed back the specific points made to the Cabinet Office and colleagues in the Department of Health. Going back to the previous point about the widespread use of specific software systems, this needs to be taken seriously as we move forward with the proposed legislation.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, one area of weakness is PNT, so how will we ensure that we still have traditional navigational and time signals of the correct type to enable all our systems to work? Will we maintain a task group to work in this area to try to resolve it by next year?

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I will discuss my noble friend's point with colleagues and will write back to him as soon as possible.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Con): My Lords, a member of my family returning to the United States in the last few days has been very inconvenienced by what occurred. I ask the Minister to adequately look at the question of redress in any legislation that we now pursue in relation to data protection generally, and to AI for that matter. It is a vital component of the GDPR. I therefore ask her to look carefully at this and make sure that adequate redress is available across all these matters.

Baroness Twycross (Lab): The Government are reviewing what happened and will implement any lessons learned as a matter of urgency. We appreciate the significant inconvenience caused to those affected, but it is a matter for individual operators. The consumer rules cover specific compensation entitlement. From my view, the essential point arising from the issues caused by CrowdStrike is the need to strengthen our resilience, which is what this Government intend to do.

Crown Estate Bill [HL]

First Reading

11.50 am

A Bill to amend the Crown Estate Act 1961.

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

Business of the House

Motion on Standing Orders

11.51 am

Moved by Baroness Smith of Basildon

That, until 24 January 2026, Standing Order 9(5) (*Hereditary peers: by-elections*) be amended as follows: leave out “three” and insert “eighteen”.

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Smith of Basildon) (Lab): My Lords, I am bringing this Motion forward after discussions with the usual channels which followed conversations with colleagues across the House. The current position is that by-elections need to take place within three months of there being a vacancy. This Motion simply extends that period, by amending the standing order, to 18 months. In practical terms, for a vacancy that arose today, a by-election would need to be held by January 2026. After 18 months—in January 2026—the Motion will be sunset and the normal time limits for by-elections will come back if they are needed by that point.

This is a temporary measure that recognises that the House will in the near future debate in more detail the wider issue of hereditary membership of your Lordships' House. The usual channels are unanimous in their view that ongoing by-elections during the parliamentary consideration of a Bill would be deeply undesirable in this context. In particular, the Cross-Bench and Conservative groups, which have two current vacancies, do not wish those by-elections to occur.

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

I am grateful for the discussions that I have had across the House on this one. As I said at the outset, it has been agreed with the usual channels. Despite our differences on the issue, we have discussed this with courtesy and respect. As the noble Lord, Lord True, said in his statement on Tuesday, that is a hallmark of this House. I beg to move.

Earl Howe (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for explaining the rationale of this Motion, which, as she said, reflects the recent discussions and agreement reached in the usual channels. On behalf of my noble friend Lord True, I am happy to give my approval to the Motion as the right and sensible course to take. As the noble Baroness is aware, the spirit of the discussions in the usual channels has been open and constructive, with good will expressed on all sides. I welcome the Government's willingness to continue engaging in the same constructive spirit and in a way that enables us to work through the implications of their proposals for this House in the round and in their totality. The 18-month timeframe proposed in the Motion will enable us to do that. On that basis, I join the noble Baroness in commending it to the House.

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, I am slightly concerned about this. I am not a usual channel and the conversations that have taken place with such amity and warmth seem not to have reached me. I was unable, I am afraid, to be present for the debate on an humble Address on Tuesday, but I have read it carefully in *Hansard* and great attention and sanctification were given to the principle of the rule of law.

We have a statutory obligation to hold these by-elections. To proceed by using standing orders to eviscerate, in effect, that statutory obligation, which is what we are doing, seems to cast a very early question on this commitment to the rule of law that we have heard about. Understanding fully, of course, that this Motion will pass, I ask the Leader of the House why 18 months has been chosen and what that portends for the Government's legislative timetable in relation to the reforms they wish to bring forward. We have no excuse here as we did before in relation to Covid; we are not in the middle of a major global health emergency, which was what justified the use of standing orders before, so can the noble Baroness explain to us what the Government's plans are that make 18 months the appropriate time? Why could it not be six months?

Lord Grocott (Lab): My Lords, I never quite thought this day would come. We have had endless Private Members' Bills and numerous discussions on the Floor of the House, and now we have recognition, which I am delighted about, from the usual channels that to hold two further hereditary Peers' by-elections at a time when Parliament was considering ending such elections would make us even more of a laughing stock than these by-elections do in any case.

I have to say it slowly: this almost certainly means the end of hereditary Peers' by-elections. That is wonderful as far as I am concerned. It means an end to the clerk having to moonlight as a returning officer; it means an

end to me having to give observations on the political significance of a particular by-election as and when it is declared; and of course it means that I shall not fulfil my ambition, which was to become the House's equivalent of Professor Sir John Curtice in relation to by-elections. I should say as well, just as a general observation, that it means an end to elections that are men-only elections and an end to elections such as one where there was an electorate of three and six candidates—unknown in the western, eastern, northern or southern world, as far as I know.

So the time has come at last, in a puff of smoke on a damp Thursday morning, when these wretched by-elections will come to a conclusion. I simply say to the noble Lord, Lord Moylan: know when it is over.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Grocott, that hereditary by-elections are probably now coming to an end. That does not stop this move being illegal; it is against the set-down rules, which is rather strange from a party whose leader was Director of Public Prosecutions and was dedicated to obeying the rule of law. The problem, of course, is that none of us in this House is legitimate; we are all appointed by one body or individual or another, and the only people who are elected by anybody are the hereditaries—so, in many ways, they have a superior right to be here than we do.

Lord Strathclyde (Con): My Lords, this is obviously a very notable victory for the noble Lord, Lord Grocott, for the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, and for the Labour Party. I pay tribute to all those who have been elected in the by-elections over the past few years. There are an excellent number on our party Benches, on the Cross Benches and right across the House, and I think these by-elections will be much missed. But I support my noble friend Lord Howe and I think he has done the right thing. It will be for history to decide in the future on the contribution of these by-elections—but I think history will note that perhaps it was better to have the Peers voting for one of their own rather than just being ticked in the box by the Prime Minister.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I wish to offer a small correction to the noble Lord, Lord Hamilton, about people being elected to this House. Plaid Cymru and the Green Party elect the people who are to be their nominees. That does not mean that we do not want a fully democratically elected House with a full public franchise.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, sometimes all that is at stake is to do the right thing by your Lordships' House. Many noble Lords approached me, the Leader of the Opposition and indeed the Convenor to say that they did not feel that this was the right time to hold such by-elections. If that is the will of the House, that is what the House should seek to do.

On a point about the rule of law, can I just correct noble Lords? I am not a lawyer and I do not know whether the noble Lords, Lord Moylan or Lord Hamilton, are, but my understanding of the law is that the House of Lords Act 1999 and the House of Lords Reform

Act 2014 both stipulated that by-elections should take place. They did not say how they would take place; that was a matter for the Standing Orders of your Lordships' House. So in no way does the proposal before your Lordships' House on the Standing Orders breach legislation. Previously, under Covid, we suspended the Standing Orders; in this case we are seeking merely to amend them for a limited time period to allow the House to debate the legislation that it has before us.

Other comments will be made as we go forward on the legislation itself. I do not think that any Member of this House has anything other than respect for all Members of the House, by whichever method they arrived here—but what we are seeking today is to have a common-sense approach within the law to deal with the by-elections. The one regret I have is that I will not get to listen to my noble friend Lord Grocott quite so often.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): Could the noble Baroness tell me whether life peerages have been offered through the usual channels to oil this deal?

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): I have to say, my Lords, that I have found it quite extraordinary that throughout the King's Speech debate Members of the party opposite, often from the Front Bench, have thought that this issue was the most important issue for them. Could I suggest to the noble Lord that he waits and has a little bit of patience, because we will have a Bill and we can debate all the issues then?

Motion agreed.

Arrangement of Business *Announcement*

12.03 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, before we resume the debate on the gracious Speech, I thought it would be helpful to the House to remind all Back-Bench speakers that the advisory time for today's debate is five minutes. That means that when the Clock has reached four minutes, noble Lords should start to make their closing remarks. At five minutes, their time is up. I have asked the Government Whips to remind noble Lords of this, if necessary, during the debate.

I thank all noble Lords for their understanding at the last five days of debate, which enabled us to rise at around the estimated time each day, allowing everyone to contribute to the debate and more certainty on travelling from the House. I am sure that noble Lords speaking in this final day of debate on the gracious Speech will be equally considerate, and I thank them in advance on behalf of the House.

King's Speech *Debate (7th Day)*

Principal topics for debate: Foreign affairs and defence

12.04 pm

Moved on Wednesday 17 July by Lord Reid of Cardowan

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty as follows:

“Most Gracious Sovereign—We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, beg leave to thank Your Majesty for the most gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament”.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent (Lab): My Lords, on behalf of your Lordships' House, I thank His Majesty the King for delivering the gracious Speech. I am grateful for the privilege of opening today's debate on the Motion for an humble Address. It is an honour to be addressing your Lordships' House from the Dispatch Box so soon after having taken up my duties, as part of the new Labour Government, a Government who are proud to serve the British people. They have given us a mandate for change and an opportunity to serve, and we will not let them down.

My right honourable friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have set us all a collective mission, a mission for economic growth, supported by a drive to restore faith in politics and internationally rebuild credibility in the UK, at home and abroad. These overarching objectives are intrinsically linked to the success of both our foreign policy and our defence industrial base. Candidly, the partnerships that we will strengthen and rebuild in defence and foreign affairs are mission critical to our plans for economic stability and growth in the coming years. While our drive to deliver economic growth at home is at the heart of our government agenda, it is coupled with a commitment to deliver a progressive and realistic foreign policy.

On his way into the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, my right honourable friend the new Foreign Secretary greeted the statue of his pioneering predecessor, and one of my personal political heroes, Ernest Bevin, a man whose approach to foreign policy was guided by a passionately progressive vision for our shared future, tempering a cool-headed realism about the world as it is with hopes for all that we want it to be. His approach to foreign policy is best considered in his own words. He said:

“Foreign policy isn't something that is great and big, it's common sense and humanity as it applies to my affairs and yours”.

That is an approach to global affairs that our new Labour Government will once again seek to emulate. Guided by that vision, from Asia to Africa to the Americas, from diplomacy to development, and from challenging human rights abuses wherever they occur, we are getting on with reconnecting Britain to the world, as well as ensuring that our nation is well prepared for whatever we may face from adversaries in the future—and we are wasting no time.

Forgive me, but as the joyous exit poll—at least for this side of your Lordships' House—was announced on the BBC, across the Caribbean people were bracing for Hurricane Beryl. On day one of this new Government, we sought to provide for and protect those who needed

[BARONESS ANDERSON OF STOKE-ON-TRENT]

our assistance. We increased support for those most affected by Hurricane Beryl across the Caribbean, including for our overseas territories and Commonwealth partners. “HMS Trent” was immediately deployed to the Cayman Islands, ready to support relief efforts. I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to all those grieving the loss of loved ones and those now seeking to rebuild their lives, particularly in Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We send our thanks to those serving on “HMS Trent” and all our Armed Forces, as well as those in our diplomatic outposts, who once again ran towards danger to help our friends and allies.

While overseeing our response to Hurricane Beryl, there was work to be done closer to home as well. In the first 48 hours of his new role, our Foreign Secretary visited Germany, Poland and Sweden as the first of our efforts to reset our relationship with European neighbours. We are hard at work to improve trade and investment with the European Union, as well as seeking to negotiate an ambitious and broad-ranging UK-EU security pact to strengthen co-operation on the threats we face, whether from hostile state actors, organised crime or extremism. In addition to our efforts with the EU, we are also seeking to establish stronger defence partnerships with France, Germany and Joint Expeditionary Force allies to complement our wider alliances. To this end, we were delighted to continue this reset by hosting the European political community at Blenheim Palace last week, where 44 European countries, plus the European Union, came together to launch a call to action, spearheaded by the UK, to disrupt the shadow fleet of ships that is helping Russia to evade sanctions.

That brings me to Putin's illegal war in Ukraine and the security threat that we all threat from Putin's aggression. My right honourable friend the Defence Secretary travelled to Odessa, following the Prime Minister's conversation with President Zelensky during his first hours in office, and our message is clear. Ukraine and its brave people have no firmer friend than the UK in their heroic fight against Putin's new form of authoritarianism, as they defend our shared security and prosperity. British support for Ukraine and the people of Ukraine remains iron clad, a message that the Prime Minister reiterated when he welcomed President Zelensky to address Cabinet last week. The UK has committed £3 billion in military aid each year until 2030-31, and we shall continue the support for as long as it is needed. As NATO allies announced at the Washington summit, together we will provide €40 billion of support to Ukraine within the year, and together we will make sure that Ukraine prevails.

A new body will be established to co-ordinate the provision of military equipment and training, and allies have agreed to ramp up industrial production. Pledges of support mean little unless they are backed up with the required support, so the UK is speeding up delivery, including of a new package of military equipment—ammunition, Brimstone missiles, artillery guns, military boats, demining vehicles and bulldozers. We were pleased to confirm with allies Ukraine's irreversible path to NATO membership, with continued

support on interoperability and the necessary reforms to smooth the path. As ever, the UK will endeavour to play a leading role.

While on the subject of NATO, I beg the indulgence of your Lordships' House to outline our new Government's engagement following the Statement made by my noble friend and Leader of the House Lady Smith of Basildon earlier this week. Just days after His Majesty the King asked our new Prime Minister to form a Government, the PM, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary travelled to Washington to meet key representatives of the US, our most important ally, and to mark three-quarters of a century since 12 founding nations came together there to launch the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I am proud that it was a Labour Government, in the guise of Ernest Bevin, who signed the initial treaty and that a Labour PM was present 75 years later to recommit our nation to the original principles of NATO.

Keeping people safe is the first duty of any Government. As a global power, a founding member of NATO and a P5 member, it is also our shared responsibility around the world, which is why the UK's commitment to NATO is unshakeable. We will set out a clear path to spending 2.5% of UK GDP on defence, as we call on others to step up too. I remind your Lordships' House that the last time the UK spent 2.5% of GDP on defence was under the last Labour Government.

My party will never shirk its responsibilities to national defence. That is why the Prime Minister has launched a root and branch strategic defence review led by my noble friend Lord Robertson, the former Secretary-General of NATO. The review will report in the first half of next year and will focus on enhancing UK homeland security, bolstering Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, modernising and maintaining the nuclear deterrent, adapting military services and equipment to meet contemporary needs, and driving the principle of “one defence” to ensure integrated and efficient operations.

We will make sure that we do what is necessary to ensure that Britain is secure at home and strong abroad. This includes setting out a triple-lock guarantee to deliver our next generation of continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent. We will boost our world-class defence sector, supporting growth and jobs and increasing investment in communities right across our United Kingdom, from Merthyr Tydfil to Portsmouth to Glasgow to Belfast.

I move on to other areas of significant geopolitical concern. It would be remiss of me not to take some time this morning to update your Lordships' House on our current efforts to end the war in Gaza. Our Foreign Secretary travelled to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories last week to progress diplomatic efforts as we strive for long-term peace and security in the Middle East. Our position is unambiguous: the UK is calling for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages, the protection of civilians and the unfettered access that is needed to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza rapidly, as well as enabling British nationals and their families still trapped in Gaza to leave.

The Foreign Secretary met the families of hostages during his visit, including those with links to the UK. He announced that the UK will provide an additional £5.5 million this year to fund the charity UK-Med's front-line work, which provides humanitarian assistance and medical treatment for thousands of people in Gaza, sending experienced humanitarian medics, including those working in the NHS, to deliver life and limb-saving healthcare. We will release £21 million to support UNRWA and its work in life-saving humanitarian responses in Gaza, providing essential services for refugees across the region and alleviating the suffering of civilians. In meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Foreign Secretary made the case for a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. He raised the importance of seeing an end to expanding illegal Israeli settlements and rising settler violence in the West Bank, as well as the need for a reformed and empowered Palestinian Authority. The world needs a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

Recent events in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan remind us of the vital importance of working in partnership with allies to achieve change on the ground. This is important in every aspect of our approach to foreign affairs, international development and defence. Wider work is now under way right across the board, including our focus on modernising our approach to international development. This has never been so urgent or important. Around the world, we are focusing on partnership, not paternalism, so that we can free people from poverty together, help countries pursue their priorities and ambitions, stand with marginalised people, and empower women and girls, who deserve to fulfil their potential that we know can lift up whole families, communities and countries. Together, we can get help to those who need it most. Together, we can reform the international financial system to help unlock finance and tackle unsustainable debt. Together, we will enhance our ability to prevent conflict and restore our reputation with international partners, and the British people. I could go on, although I am sure some noble Lords will wish me not to.

Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary was in Delhi to meet Prime Minister Modi and Foreign Minister Jaishankar to cement stronger partnerships on tech, climate and growth. Today, he is in Laos to meet Foreign Ministers from across south-east Asia and the wider region. Even in these early days of our new Labour Government, we are working on so much more behind the scenes, from making real the rights we all hold in common, making the most of rapidly changing technology, tackling corruption and money laundering to working with our proud diaspora communities to enhance our cultural links around the world. We are building stronger partnerships in Africa, Asia and the Pacific; making sure that we have a strong, consistent and long-term strategic approach to China; addressing the hybrid threat posed by Russia; and, of course, tackling the climate and nature crisis—building resilience, convening a new clean power alliance, and protecting and restoring the wonders of the natural world on which we all depend, from the Amazon to the Congo Basin to Indonesia and the global ocean.

The world faces immense challenges. Yet Britain is stronger when we work with others. We should be in no doubt that our modern, multicultural, proudly internationalist country has enormous potential. Together, we can build on the progress made by all those who came before us, make a real difference to the lives of working people and build a better future for us all. There is much to discuss. We look forward to listening to your Lordships' contributions today and to working with you in the months ahead for our country and for our planet

12.17 pm

Baroness Goldie (Con): My Lords, it is a privilege and an unexpected pleasure to find myself at the Dispatch Box opening this debate for His Majesty's loyal Opposition in this House. Just when I thought I might acquire a cat, grow roses and take up knitting, it seems that my noble friend the Opposition Chief Whip had other ideas. My noble friend Lord Minto is unavailable today—hence this cameo appearance.

I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, on their ministerial appointments and warmly welcome them to the Government Front Bench. I wish them both well. When I was a Defence Minister, I greatly respected the noble Lord; he is a man of principle and integrity who believes passionately in our defence and security. I found him constructive and pragmatic. In opposition, I and my colleagues will seek to emulate that good example.

I also pay tribute to former Defence Secretaries of State Ben Wallace and Grant Shapps. Ben was a fearless advocate for the MoD and its people, military and civilian, and he won admiration across the political spectrum for his leadership, which Grant Shapps prosecuted with energy. With the MoD working in tandem with my noble friends Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton, the former Foreign Secretary, and Lord Ahmad of State at the FCDO, two hugely respected global politicians, it constituted a very impressive defence and diplomatic presence on the global stage for the United Kingdom. It paid dividends and I thank them. In restaurant parlance, that deals with the amuse-bouche. Let me now get into the menu.

There has been a change of Government, but the complexity and intensity of the threats we face remain the same. Looking at the starters, I hope that the Government will still find some relevance in the integrated review and the integrated review refresh. Of course, the Government, under *Britain Reconnected*, may want to place their own emphasis on aspects of the IR, but I suggest that tearing it up would be unwise. I also gently suggest, in relation to defence and foreign affairs, Britain is already very well connected, and the Ministers to whom I referred were some of the prime connectors.

We led the charge to support Ukraine in defending herself against President Putin's illegal invasion. We worked tirelessly with international partners to maximise the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, while supporting negotiations to secure the release of the Israeli hostages. Having listened to the Minister, I give all encouragement to the Government's advocacy and interventions to try to improve that desperately worrying situation. We

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

produced a groundbreaking White Paper on international development, which drew in the support of all political parties, to tackle global poverty. We have been a pivotal supporter of NATO. We have responded to the tensions and threat to maritime passage in the Red Sea, and we have made the Indo-Pacific tilt a reality with combined diplomatic and defence activity. That is all existing, rock-solid connection, and these Benches will support all endeavours by the new Government to maintain and build on that global connection. The Government are right to recognise the importance of these connections. It is nurturing these relationships that gives us influence.

Having dealt with the starters, let us now look at the rest of the menu. In foreign affairs, the Labour manifesto seeks to reset the UK-EU relationship. Within the important constraints of UK sovereignty, I think there is scope to develop new opportunities with the EU. The caveat must be to guard against being drawn into arrangements which, if they do not deliver, prove very sticky when we try to extricate ourselves. Pragmatism and a weather-eye should be the watchwords. They are dishes with a tasty potential, but they could turn indigestible.

The new Government's aspirations—to tackle corruption and money laundering, be fully committed to AUKUS, conduct an audit of the UK-China relationship and protect the overseas territories' and Crown dependencies' sovereignty—all deserve support. That is solid fare, but these dishes need to be kept bubbling in the cooker, and we on these Benches will be checking the temperature.

Much more problematic are the various ambitions under the manifesto commitments of championing UK prosperity, climate leadership, strengthening diplomacy and modernising international development. We are into à la carte territory here. The dishes sound exotic, perhaps invitingly tasty, but without knowing the ingredients, they are just a culinary wish list, not dishes ready to serve. We will need much more detail. In that quest, can the Minister tell us, when he winds up, whether the previous Government's White Paper on international development will contribute to the new Government's objectives? On climate leadership, will the Government explain what a "clean power alliance" is? Who is to be in it, and for what purpose? When will it deliver whatever it is meant to deliver?

I now turn to defence. This is where the menu is certainly à la carte—indeed, some of the dishes may be unknown even to the chef. As to the effect on the digestive system, let me explore. My starting point is the Government's recognition in their manifesto that the first duty of any Government is to keep the country safe. I wholeheartedly agree. However, from the primary obligation, onerous and inescapable consequences follow. I welcome the Government's steadfast commitment to continue supporting Ukraine, their unshakeable commitment to NATO, their absolute commitment to our nuclear deterrent, their explicit commitment to AUKUS and the very welcome clarification and confirmation from the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in this House on Tuesday, that the Global Combat Air Programme will proceed. On that last matter, given the comments made earlier in the House at Oral Questions,

can we nail this down? Is the relative statutory instrument coming before the House next week? This is a rich and sumptuous fare, and these Benches will support all of it.

A stand-alone item on the menu is the strategic defence review. I accept that any incoming Government will want to stocktake. The appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, whom I am pleased to see in his place, is reassuring. He is hugely respected, and his authority and expertise will bring substance to the review. However, even before he begins his work, he finds smoke pouring out of the kitchen. His boundary for the review is

"within the trajectory to 2.5%"—

I presume that is a reference to GDP, although the terms of reference do not actually say that. A trajectory normally means the most direct route from point A to point B. At the moment, there is no point A. If there is no point A, where is point B to be found? This is, frankly, farcical. The Government now need to commit to a start point for spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. If that really is the first duty of this Government, as their manifesto proclaims, they need to put their money where their mouth is.

I am sorry to be so blunt, but this clarity is so important and so critical to our global credibility, not least within NATO, that it must be addressed now. At least then the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, will have a clearer view of the kitchen. Will the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in responding to this debate, if he cannot provide a specific road map to 2.5%, at least acknowledge the cogency of the concerns that I am articulating, which are to be found not only in this Chamber but more broadly? Even with that clarity of 2.5%, the budget will be severely stretched to combat the rising threats that the manifesto identifies. Quite simply, if the Government will not provide that clarity, we are right off the menu and reaching for bottles of Gaviscon.

Your Lordships will be relieved to hear that we have arrived at the desserts. To finish on an optimistic note, I have included some dishes of my own. I referred earlier to the Indo-Pacific tilt. The manifesto was silent on this, apart from an audit of the UK-China relationship, and I do not recall it featuring in the King's gracious Speech. However, I was very relieved to learn that, in a recent briefing to the media, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, certainly identified what he described as a "deadly quartet of nations"—China, Iran, Russia and North Korea—from which I infer and assume the Indo-Pacific region will be covered in the SDR.

When I was a Defence Minister, one of the most productive parts of the job was increasingly working in tandem with my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, my counterpart in the FCDO. The FCDO and the MoD can collaborate to great mutual benefit, and that closer relationship is a way forward. My queen of puddings is that the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, and his noble friend Lord Collins of Highbury, who is also a highly respected Member of this House, will push forward that collaboration. Within the MoD, I found my most effective work abroad was born out of excellent defence attachés working closely with their FCDO counterparts in the host countries. My

crêpes Suzette is that the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, should be given the same opportunities that I received and that he will fight the corner of the defence attachés.

In relation to defence and foreign affairs, there is much which unites the Government and these Benches. The Minister referred to common sense and humanity—I agree, and I would add “expediency”. The Pole Star of these Benches will always be the national interest: where we have questions, we shall ask them; where we have concerns, we shall raise them; if we have criticisms, we shall make them, but we shall do so always to support and protect the national interest. And if we can provide constructive help to the Government, we shall willingly give it.

12.27 pm

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, there has been a significant amount of change in your Lordships' House since the election. Clearly, the caterers have changed sides, and the consumers have obviously decided that the menu from the Labour Party was a little more attractive than that of the Conservatives. The noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, has looked at the menu and responded. From these Benches—where we have not changed places, either physically, since we have not moved across the Chamber, or in our portfolios—I wonder if our role is to be here as restaurant critics considering what the new Government are offering compared with what their predecessor offered. In that sense, I find myself in a slightly odd position. One of the things that was always a great pleasure from these Benches was the extent to which, when the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, was Minister of State, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, now the Minister of State, was sitting on the Labour Benches, the three of us would agree very strongly on many issues associated with defence. Just as the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, said at the end of her remarks, that His Majesty's loyal Opposition will support His Majesty's Government on matters of state associated with defence and in the national interest, so too will we from these Benches.

However, I was not proposing to speak about menus; I was proposing to speak predominantly about defence. Although we have many speakers from these Benches on the Motion for an humble Address today, I suspect that my colleagues will be speaking predominantly on the foreign affairs aspect, so I will focus predominantly on defence. Clearly, we cannot consider defence in isolation—against whom are we protecting ourselves? I want to talk primarily about the defence review and a certain set of defence issues that have perhaps been underplayed so far this morning.

I have already welcomed the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to his place in a Question earlier in the week, but I also welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, to her place. She is the spokesperson in His Majesty's Government for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but one of the things that she omitted, rather humbly, to mention this morning is her great commitment to defence. It is a real pleasure to speak after the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson.

I note how committed the new Government are to defence. It was almost the first thing that was mentioned in the gracious Speech. In opening, His Majesty said

that his Government's legislative programme will be “mission led”—I am not quite sure which missions we are talking about—

“based upon the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all”.

The security of the realm is the first duty of the state. It is welcome that His Majesty's Government have made a commitment to increased defence expenditure. One area that I touched on already this morning, along with the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, is a path towards 2.5%. The noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, has said that a clear path will be indicated. However, if the new defence review is to consider not just the challenges of the last decade but of the next decade, and given that we have a new Chief of the General Staff who is talking about the need to prepare for war, is 2.5% going to be enough?

There is always a danger in using percentages, and saying that we aspire to 2% or 2.5%. Should His Majesty's Government be looking at percentages, or have the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, and the rest of the team been offered the opportunity to fundamentally review the challenges? Are Russia, China, Iran and North Korea perhaps acting as an axis? Do we need to consider whether 2.5% is right? Will the MoD be willing to challenge the Chancellor if this review finds that defence expenditure needs to be higher? The challenges are so significant, and I am sure my colleagues will talk about many of the foreign policy challenges that we need to be considering.

I do not really believe in percentages, but as a quick aside, I believe that the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, gave a commitment to increase the expenditure on development aid back to 0.7% when the financial circumstances permitted. I thought that was the policy of the outgoing Government. What is the position of the current Government? Will that happen only when the fiscal circumstances allow, or could we potentially have a timeline for that?

The defence review is clearly very important, and it is important that we do not pre-empt its outcome. At the same time, we have already heard about the commitment to GCAP, about which we will be talking again on Monday. There are also commitments to AUKUS. It is surely vital that we do two things, as a country, and as His Majesty's Government. One is to make sure that we keep our allies fully abreast of what is being done in defence and foreign policy co-operation, so that nobody is blindsided by the outcome of the defence review. That applies to GCAP and to AUKUS. It would be very helpful if the Minister could tell the House about some of those discussions. It is also important that we talk to the defence industrial base. The noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, has already mentioned that. We need to talk to suppliers—not just the primes but also the subprimes. Could the Minister tell the House what commitments the Government can give to SMEs in the defence sector, particularly those that are led by veterans? If they are bidding for contracts, one of the key things they need is a degree of certainty.

Finally, the only bit of the gracious Speech that talked about legislation in defence was about the Armed Forces commissioner. That is clearly a very welcome

[BARONESS SMITH OF NEWNHAM]

post, but it is also part of the wider issues that His Majesty's Government are going to have to take in hand. These include how far the Government are going to be able to improve recruitment and retention, and Armed Forces accommodation, and make sure that we do the right thing by our service personnel, veterans and their families, because we all owe them a huge debt of gratitude. There are many questions for the Minister, but we wish him well.

12.36 pm

Baroness D'Souza (CB): My Lords, I welcome the government manifesto commitments to new trade agreements, modernising international development, NATO and nuclear deterrence, but focused action on some of the more urgent threats to the UK's security, stability, influence and growth would also be welcomed.

I start with China. China is described as aggressive, unco-operative and authoritarian—all the more reason, perhaps, to build a consistent and thought-through policy for dealing with a potential enemy. The USA is the world's richest nation in reserves, trading economy, military strength and world influence, but China is catching up and has a clear strategic approach to superseding the USA's number one position. The USA supports the world's democracies by sending arms, personnel and aid, and is not above toppling dictators. This is very expensive, and not always successful. The USA is formally committed to defending more countries than at any other time in its history, and its defence budget far outstrips that of China. China conserves and increases its wealth by strategic belt and road initiatives, enabling the purchase of crucial ports in, for example, Djibouti and Sri Lanka. It seeks to make alliances with and gain information from countries around the world, no matter how hostile, but refuses to interfere in domestic issues—for example, the no arms deal to Ukraine but dual-purpose military equipment only. China has the highest number of diplomatic missions around the world. One sub-Saharan official remarked that if you speak to the USA you get a lecture and if you speak to China you get an airport.

China's stated intentions and actions point to an expectation of becoming the world's primary economy—in other words, “making China great again”. This could include taking control of major international shipping lanes, reclaiming Taiwan, and reducing many countries in south-east Asia and the Pacific to client states. However, for complex reasons, China's domestic economy has been shaken in recent years. As the Chinese Communist Party's continued authority lies largely in its economic stability, this is a source of concern for China, and there are increasing internal tensions. The response in China has been to focus on national security, and increasing domestic manufacturing and consumer purchase. I wonder whether we might use this lull—if it can be called that—to plan more effective competition.

The UK has woken up to the real danger that China poses, due in part to Ukraine. The task is to make it abundantly clear that we will take action, including public and frequent condemnation of “grey zone” attacks; the imposition of Magnitsky sanctions against selected Chinese officials; reducing the number

of Chinese students accepted for further study in the UK; strict prohibitions on the importation of any technology capable of surveillance, including electronic cars and all cellular internet of things modules; and establishing full diplomatic relations with Taiwan—very controversial, but something we should perhaps move towards. These moves would undoubtedly provoke retaliatory action from China but would also signal to the world that the de facto independence of Taiwan must progress toward a de jure state. Additionally, the UK could impose strict criminal sentences on any attempts to kidnap or harm in any way Chinese citizens, whether from Hong Kong or defectors.

Finally, we all know that co-ordinated action is more effective and thus the UK, in its international relations, must help to build a body of consensus among nations to resist Chinese encroachment on freedoms. The overall message to the People's Republic of China must be, first, that the world will not condone the Chinese destiny of territorial acquisition or allow the bullying and flouting of the existing rules-based order to prevail, and that the consequences of gross intransigence will be severe. Secondly, a war between the West and China would be, as we all know, an unmitigated catastrophe, but it would affect China as much as it would affect the entire world. This is the reason why China's territorial ambitions must be confronted.

12.41 pm

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I join noble Lords in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, on their appointments and on their party's first King's Speech. As a successor to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, the noble Baroness has a very hard act to follow indeed, as I am sure the whole House will recognise. I also congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, on her remarkable meal, which, as I missed breakfast, may result in me leaving quickly to have lunch—but it will not be as good.

As others have indicated, we are living in unstable times. The Anglican Communion, in 165 countries, finds almost half our members facing conflict. Issues elsewhere in the world, however, do not confine themselves to affecting us in our international policy alone. We are recognised now by the United Nations as the most diverse nation on earth. That means that every single overseas conflict or disaster has a diaspora community here. To build a cohesive society here, domestic and foreign policy must work hand in glove.

That is seen with Israel and Gaza. Conflict overseas has a profound impact on our own society and our own domestic policies because of the multicultural nature of our communities. Interfaith dialogue in this country has almost collapsed since 7 October last year and tensions are high, and that is entirely as a result of overseas matters.

The interplay is also clear in our response to questions of mass migration and climate change. Domestic challenges require cross-border solutions if they are to be effective. I ask the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, what structures there will be in government to ensure that co-ordination.

I welcome the Government's approach and intentions for foreign policy expressed so far, including their commitment to ongoing support for Ukraine, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, a two-state solution, and upholding international law and investing in international co-operation and institutions. I welcome the strategic defence review, with its aims of reinvestment in our Armed Forces, in their effectiveness and—as was just mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith—in their well-being.

Noble Lords will know that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office houses the pithily named negotiations and peace processes team in the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, established by the Conservative Government by the noble Earl, Lord Howe. It has been enormously effective. The cost—financial, human and every other—of trying to prevent conflict is far smaller than the cost of war once it has broken out. It can happen in many places where we would never intervene militarily but where our interests are deeply at stake. Further investment in making peace should be considered alongside the necessary and urgent increase in spending on our military force. Both are insurance premia, and they need paying. Peacebuilding in the DRC, for example, where China and Wagner are active, and which is the worst area for sexual violence in conflict, is also essential for the world's green ambitions.

Secondly—I am beginning to wind up—it is essential that our foreign policy is religiously literate. Some 85% of the world's population identifies with a faith. To engage with foreign policy without doing so is madness. I welcome the intention, for example, to develop a strategy for Africa. However, to do so without consideration of religious faith makes absolutely no sense at all.

The Labour manifesto said:

“Government is at its best when working in partnership with business, trade unions, civil society, faith groups, and communities. But without a shared project those partnerships barely get off the ground”.

In Mozambique, Anglicans, in partnership with the UN, have played a significant part in building groups to undermine the hold of ISIS in Cabo Delgado. There are innumerable faith groups and NGOs that will wish to deploy their ability and local knowledge similarly. We look forward to working with this Government as with the last.

12.47 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friends, the new Ministers responsible for foreign affairs and defence, and wish them well.

In a broadcast interview this week, the Foreign Secretary said that an immediate ceasefire in Gaza is one of his highest priorities. After the weakness of the Conservative Government's response to the catastrophe that has occurred in Gaza following Hamas's horrendous attack on Israeli civilians, this is most welcome, but rapid and meaningful action must follow.

The decision to restart funding for UNRWA and to increase it is a good beginning after the prevarication by the previous Government. Without it, the delivery of aid to Gaza is jeopardised. But necessary as more

humanitarian aid is, it is not a solution. A report by 21 UK charities on the steps the Government need to take in their first 100 days describes the recent focus on aid to Gaza as a “sticking plaster”. Delivering aid while the bombs keep falling means that yet more infrastructure is destroyed, yet more civilians are killed or maimed, and hunger, thirst and disease continue among the survivors. This report deserves to be widely read.

I will now focus on a few of the wider issues that the report raises, starting with the UK provision of arms to Israel, some of which are directly deployed in military action that kills civilians. We should not be complicit in the death toll, which includes around 20,000 children, even though our delivery of arms to Israel is a small proportion of the total. The Foreign Secretary said he would publish the legal advice he has sought. Can the Minister say when this will be? There can be no reason why it should not be imminent.

The second issue concerns the unconditional release of the hostages and the alleviation of their and their relatives' awful suffering. There are also around 60,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails under arbitrary administrative detention. They too should be released. What diplomatic steps are the Government taking to try to secure the release of both groups?

I turn to international humanitarian law and its application to all the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The International Court of Justice stated last week that their occupation violates international law. In an earlier judgment following a case brought by South Africa, it said that there are plausible grounds to claim that Israel is committing a genocide, and it issued a provisional measure that Israel should refrain from violating the genocide convention. Human rights lawyers have also drawn attention to the Geneva conventions on the conduct of war being violated in Gaza. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Government will uphold the decisions of the international courts and indicate the follow-up steps they will take?

I end on a two-state solution, which western Governments have sheltered behind for far too long but done little to make a reality. De facto Israeli annexation of the West Bank is a serious block to a two-state solution, as well as a violation of international law. Will the Government work with the international community to exert pressure to prevent any more settlements and to insist on respecting the rights of the Palestinians on the West Bank, where disgraceful settler violence often goes unchecked?

Yesterday, there was a damning verdict by the *Financial Times* on inaction by the West. This inaction, it rightly says

“feeds perceptions of Western hypocrisy”

around the world and

“undermines the notion of a just, rules-based international order”,

which we must all seek. Until we have a recalibration of our policies, which should include the rapid recognition of a Palestinian state and a durable solution to Israeli security, Palestinian rights will never be attained.

12.51 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, the world is indeed, if not actually on fire, in a very dangerous state, as we have been reminded. Here, we have been told recently by those in authority that we must prepare for war in a few years' time. Preparing for war is of course a vastly expensive business; it involves not more wages, higher pensions and all the rest but hardship and cutting back to finance the dreadful demands and dreadful expense of war.

We are going to have our strategic review. I say straightaway that I am a strong fan of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, who I see is sitting here. I am also a fan of Fiona Hill. I just wonder, though, whether we are right to air in public all the problems and weaknesses, if we have them, in our defence structure against modern technology, which is changing by the hour. I am obviously a supporter, increasingly over the years, of parliamentary accountability, publicity and so on, yet the nature of war is full of surprises and secrets. Those secrets themselves are weapons, and if we go too far in discussing everything in public and debating it in our splendid Parliament, we tell our enemies a lot about how they should react. Let us go with caution into this review and realise that a basic message is all that is necessary: that if any nation stings us, we will sting back with 10 times the ferocity. That is the basic stance that we want to prevail.

Let me spend my last three minutes on outlining some themes that, in opposition, we can usefully and constructively help with in creating the kind of national unity and togetherness of society that the most reverend Primate has just spoken about. I make the following points.

First, does our capitalism really work for everybody? It is asserted that it does, but the vast majority of young people think that it does not. It is not a sufficient system, in its modern digital form, to deliver what billions of people throughout the planet really want. The younger generation is deeply disappointed and critical of it. We need much wider capital ownership—as well as strong incomes and wages, obviously—to give households and families the dignity and security that capital gives in a very dangerous age. People may say: what about levelling up? That is one of the aspects of levelling up that we should promote much more strongly, whatever party is in power. A wider capital-owning democracy has certainly been a theme in my party for 50 or 60 years. That is one theme that we on our side must work on to support the Labour Government and, I hope, carry them with us.

Secondly, we must take back control of our foreign policy. This is an age of looser alliances and of networks, which I do not think every policymaker, certainly in America, fully understands. In this country, we are crazy not to bring our own network—the biggest in the world, the Commonwealth network of 56 countries—far closer to the centre of our strategy and linkages. There may not always be a pattern of Governments agreeing with each other, but the point about the Commonwealth that makes it a 21st-century organisation is that it links at every level: from primary school and university to every profession, every level of training

and every kind of friendship. We are very lucky to have that kind of linkage and should work much more on it.

Thirdly, we need to work with Japan, our great friend in Asia. If there is any question of revising some of these big defence contracts, I hope it will be done not by rumour and hint but in an open, friendly way.

Finally, our energy policy is a mess and remains far from achieving the objectives of the net zero that we want. We have vast expenditure ahead, and delusions that somehow renewables are carrying us along. They are not at all. We will have to multiply our renewables by at least four times, we have to multiply our nuclear by five or six times, and we need an entirely new national transmission grid, with a thousand miles of pylons. On carbon capture and storage, we have barely begun.

Where the Government are moving on all these issues, I hope we will help, and constructively. But where they are failing to move or simply do not understand what is happening, we will step in and put all our brainpower and effort into preparing for the day when what goes down comes up. Perhaps the Conservatives will step back into government again. Either way, both parties should work together.

12.57 pm

Lord Craig of Radley (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the Government on their successful election strategy and, in particular, the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on his well-merited appointment as the Minister of State.

Recent media reports of MoD officials saying that our Armed Forces cannot successfully defend the UK itself are seriously troubling. We should not be in such a parlous state. The defence of the home base, particularly in maritime, air and space terms, has been sidestepped, taking second place to overseas operations for far too long. Yes, there were pressures to contribute overseas, along with messianic enthusiasm at times to do so. After the Cold War, there were worries that if our Armed Forces were not on live operations, they could be further reduced as too expensive and unneeded. Our home base is inadequately defended against the types of threat that we see and hear of today.

Nor should we envisage only a formal interstate conflict, with the expectation that our own resistance would be supported and bolstered by our NATO allies. The Wagner-type group and others show how threateningly capable such mercenary proxy forces become. Ship-based drones or guided missiles, funded by a hostile state, could be targeted directly on the UK base itself, perhaps in self-justified retaliation. Where is our iron dome over London, say, or a sizeable fleet to patrol and protect our island base and guard our ever-growing interconnectors and communications links, on which all modern life depends?

A single missile exploding in Parliament Square would cause no end of fear, death and public outrage that such an attack was not forestalled. The strategic deterrent would not be an appropriate response. There is much of pressing urgency to review.

Another vital aspect is how to integrate AI with military operations and decision-making. A human in the loop seems essential if kinetic force is to be used

and death or destruction follows. Perhaps achievable in the usual types of exchange of fire, how will it transfer to operations involving cyber or space activity, or even hypersonic missiles, when the time for human consideration and decision-taking are collapsed to mini-seconds?

Reports of Israeli use of AI to track Hamas operatives and then kill them at home, even with their immediate family or friends, show how AI integration of many features and details of an individual—their daily routine, phone, car number plate or whatever—can now provide real-time information and the location of a targeted individual, let alone that of an operational unit. There is much to learn from these Israeli efforts, and how they relate to the laws of conflict and humanitarian law.

Happily, Conservative and Labour seem on the same page when dealing with our nuclear deterrent and with NATO, in ongoing support of Ukraine and on the need, sooner or later, to increase annual defence expenditure to 2.5% of GDP. Such a cross-party approach to national defence is good. The intention to seek input to the SDR work widely and with more of a national as opposed to party approach is thus most welcome.

1.01 pm

Baroness Anelay of St Johns (Con): My Lords, multilateralism is under attack from all sides. Secretary-General Guterres has made it clear that:

“The climate and biodiversity crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and enormous inequalities pose a threat to all three pillars of the work of the United Nations”.

The Conservative Government's White Paper, *International Development in a Contested World: Ending Extreme Poverty and Tackling Climate Change*, showed a renewed commitment to multilateralism. The Labour Government have a major opportunity to demonstrate internationally their commitment to multilateralism when the Prime Minister and other Ministers attend the G20 in Brazil in November this year. What plans do they have to do just that?

The preparations already made by the Government of Brazil make clear their commitment to engage parliamentarians in the discussions leading up to the main event. Three weeks ago, I had the privilege of taking part in the inaugural P20 women parliamentarians' meeting in Maceió in north-east Brazil. I thank the Lord Speaker for inviting me to represent this House, and Žana Paul, deputy head of inter-parliamentary relations, whose support before and during the P20 was invaluable, as was the help of our wonderful UK embassy in Brazil.

At the P20 I focused on the impact of climate change on women, girls and indigenous communities, who are disproportionately affected by the worst impacts of climate change. Drought is but one of several extreme weather events intensified by climate change. When it hits, family incomes drop sharply and hard choices often involve pulling daughters out of school to help out on the farm or be married off to alleviate the family's economic burden. On the other hand, research shows that keeping girls in school and enabling them to complete their education correlates with better adaptation to climate change. Women and girls who

survive extreme weather events also face unique challenges and dangers during displacement. Among them is sexual violence, exploitation and abuse.

We can be successful in our work to remediate and mitigate climate change only if we work together both multilaterally and bilaterally to unlock the full potential and power of women and girls so that we accelerate progress on all global development priorities. I therefore welcomed the joint declaration by the UK and Brazil last year that they would work in partnership on green and inclusive growth and

“foster a just and inclusive ecological transition”.

Will the Minister confirm today that the Government support that joint declaration?

It is vital to integrate gender equality into all our economic diplomacy in order to create meaningful jobs and trading opportunities and to leverage innovative investment in and for women. While I was in Maceió, I met the female founders of Mulheres Conectadas, a social technology start-up. It was supported by the UK in its initial stages. Mulheres Conectadas has participated in the Future Females Business School, a programme promoted by the UK-Brazil Tech Hub to assist early-stage, women-led start-ups. It has helped more than 350 entrepreneurs to transform ideas into tech-enabled businesses. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will continue to support the UK-Brazil Tech Hub, and that they will continue to develop the global network of international tech partnerships to build digital ecosystems that will facilitate sustainable economic growth and development?

The UK has been a long-term champion of the rights of women and girls around the world through our diplomatic, development and legislative work. I look forward to hearing from the Minister today what plans the Government have to make further progress on those issues.

1.06 pm

Lord Peach (CB): My Lords, I join in welcoming the Minister to the Dispatch Box and I align with the tributes to his predecessors. Your Lordships' House is well aware of the number and range of wars, conflicts, crises and emergencies, as has already been well set out. My point is that the number of these events and the effect they create are accumulating.

Your Lordships' House is also aware that predictions are a risky business, but my prediction today is that Russia will not stop being disagreeable, and worse; that China, to agree with the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, will not pause in challenging the rules-based international system, collecting intelligence and intellectual property aggressively; and, to agree with the noble Lord, Lord West, that China will also challenge the freedom of navigation at sea around the world and in the air.

Given this multiplicity of challenges, our Armed Forces need to be ready to deter, to defend—at home as well as our overseas territories and allies—to respond and to support an ever-wider definition of national security, which includes those tasks that remain constant, such as nuclear deterrence, air defence and the maritime defence of our country and its overseas territories, counterterrorism and protecting our critical national infrastructure, including our undersea cables.

[LORD PEACH]

My contention, with which I hope the Minister agrees, is that we need to apply the lessons from the war in Ukraine now. We note the critical importance of control of the air. Tragically, Ukrainians now have experience of fighting without it. We see the importance of land and air working together with maritime forces in joint manoeuvre, and, as the noble Lord, Lord West, reminded us earlier, of the electronic warfare that is being practised by Russia against Ukraine. That is a very significant issue that needs to be dealt with. As the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, pointed out, we see that space and AI are now not distant dreams; they are reality, and we need to have a strategy for them.

There are no silver bullets, but to expect success we need sufficient regulars, more reserves and contractors, and civil servants who can and will deploy. One model that the Minister and the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, may wish to consider is total defence, as practised by our very good allies and friends in Finland and Sweden. They bring much capability to our alliance in NATO and set an example of how to organise for defence.

There is much to do: we need to raise the nuclear IQ in our country and therefore bring more focus to nuclear deterrence; we must deliver AUKUS as a strategic programme, interchangeable with our closest allies; we should enhance our conventional deterrence, commit to NATO plans and capabilities and lead the Joint Expeditionary Force. I agree with the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig; we need to consider the need for civil defence through an expanded regular Reserve and better recruiting and retention. Does the Minister agree that we all have a responsibility to make the case for wise foreign policy and a stronger defence?

1.10 pm

Lord Jopling (Con): My Lords, I want to talk about NATO. I had the honour of serving until recent years on the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly over a period of rather over 30 years. Of course, for nearly all my adult life, we have seen NATO as a highly successful alliance at the core of our defence strategies. However, in recent years, I cannot help feeling that NATO has lost the dynamism of the years when the likes of the late Lord Carrington and the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, were the Secretary-General, and I question if today it is fit for purpose. I cannot help feeling that it has all become a bit sleepy. This could not come at a more dangerous time, of course, with Russia, China and their friends flexing their muscles and with war raging in Ukraine and Israel, so I look to our new Government to wake up NATO.

I want to give four examples of why I am unhappy. First, and most importantly, I am appalled at the blind indifference of some states, who ought to know better, to honouring the solemn promises they made 10 years ago to spend 2% of their GDP on defence. It really is not acceptable that responsible states such as Canada, Italy, Spain and, inevitably, Belgium are malingering. We are all too polite to shame those who cannot even reach the 2% target; that must change, as well, of

course, as the 2% target. Surely, the 2% was correct 10 years ago, but it is inadequate today and 2.5% should be a minimum.

Secondly, I am unhappy that nothing is sleepier in NATO than the interminable 16 years or so that it took, having decided to build a new headquarters, to build and occupy its new premises across the road. That really is not an accolade for an organisation which is supposed to believe in rapid reaction.

Thirdly, I saw for myself, when attending NATO exercises, the problems of red tape in moving military or civilian assets across national frontiers, with frequent hold-ups. It really is a disgrace, and one might have thought that these problems should have been apparent years ago and eliminated.

Finally, some years ago, the international auditors who deal with NATO's bookkeeping and finances seriously criticised its accounts. I tried on two occasions to confront the Secretary-General to address these issues, only to be what I regarded as rudely brushed aside with no attempt whatever to answer those really pressing questions. I know the Secretary-General is soon to retire, and I can only hope that his successor does rather better. I hear that the departing Secretary-General has plans afoot to publish his memoirs next year. All I can say is that it is a pity he did not wait to write them until after he had gone.

1.14 pm

Lord Alderdice (LD): My Lords, how to address in five minutes the range of foreign affairs and defence in a fast-changing world, and the context of deepening global conflict? Since 1964—fully 60 years ago—we have had not a War Office, but a Ministry of Defence. I welcome the immediate announcement by the Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, that we are to have a new strategic defence review, and I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, on his appointment to lead that review. Can I appeal to the noble Lord to focus on defence, but defence in its widest?

When we fought the two previous global conflicts, the world was a different place. Britain had responsibility for a global empire and was able to call on the people and resources of that empire to fight those wars. We no longer have such resources, and our main responsibilities are not the conduct of wars in other places, but the defence of our own country and its territories. It is clear that our UK military is currently unprepared for a conflict on any scale, and our Armed Forces would be unable to defend our country beyond a few weeks in the event of a serious threat.

In recent years, our Governments have engaged, at inordinate cost, in too many unwinnable wars of choice. I say unwinnable because it is now clear to any objective student of war that while the nature of war has not changed, the character of armed conflict has changed dramatically. The use of overwhelming force no longer ensures victory and success. Since 1945, the most powerful political, economic, and military state in the world has engaged in wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and elsewhere. The Korean War was a draw and North Korea is now a threat to world order. Vietnam and Afghanistan were costly defeats, and Iraq, Syria and Libya are chaotic,

failed states that are now nurseries of violent terrorism and insurgency, not examples of post-war liberal democracy. It seems likely that Russia in Ukraine and Israel in Gaza will also fail to achieve their war aims, but a huge number of people have already died, massive resources have been expended and the world is in a more dangerous place than ever before.

Wars are no longer won by powerful and well-resourced rational actors operating on best socioeconomic and power judgments. They are increasingly won by devoted actors who are prepared to fight, kill and die in the service of values they hold to be ultimate: this is a new scenario. As I have told this House before, on a number of occasions, the third global conflict is already upon us, initially in cyberspace—I say in passing that I welcome the creation of the NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre in Belgium—but increasingly not just in cyberspace but on land, sea, air and in space. Enemies attack us too on our own territory. We also have to defend ourselves increasingly against pandemics, floods and other climate catastrophes.

In addition to our academic health researchers and our meteorological experts, the logistical experience of our military was crucial during the pandemic and recent floods, and the strategic defence review must appreciate that we need more men and women who are trained to assist us in all forms of defence, not just more of the technology of war. We need to have enough people with a range of skills for all defence requirements, including, but not exclusively, military requirements. A study—it has already been mentioned by another noble Lord—of how countries such as Finland, Switzerland and Sweden engage in “whole of society defence” of their countries would pay dividends.

It is not just our country that is under attack: the whole of the global rules-based system is in peril. We must insist that not only our enemies but, even more importantly, our allies are committed to the force of law, not the law of force. When President Putin disregarded the rule of law and attacked Ukraine, we rightly stood in defence of Ukraine and against that aggression. But it is now clear beyond peradventure that not only has Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza been characterised by crimes against humanity, and by an utterly disproportionate reaction to the ghastly, horrible, unjustifiable Hamas attack on 7 October, but that Israel's occupation of Palestine is illegal and has been illegal for decades. It is no longer a question of political negotiation of a two-state solution, and I have repeatedly told the House it is past time for that: any negotiation should be about how to implement international law. With a Prime Minister who is a distinguished lawyer, I hope this country will take the lead in the defence of the international rules-based order.

1.20 pm

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): I thank the Minister for a thoughtful introduction to the debate and I warmly welcome that the response will come from the noble Lord, Lord Coaker—the hero of our Rwanda debates. The House is well aware that Portobello Road in London is so called to celebrate Admiral Vernon's great victory in 1739. I expect Rwanda Road to follow soon.

It was an Anglophile Dutch statesman who once said that there are only two kinds of European countries—those that are medium-sized powers and those that have not yet realised that they are medium-sized powers. I like the Labour manifesto's call for a “progressive but realistic” foreign policy. I think we may be turning the page. After the bombast and bluster, there was a mature modesty—welcomed abroad—in the manifesto promise that we will be

“a reliable partner, a dependable ally, and a good neighbour”.

The Prime Minister has made an excellent start, and the speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, suggests that there will be a responsible, helpful Opposition.

But, to be honest, there was not much realism about Ukraine in the election—about how much we will have to spend helping Ukraine and remedying our hollowed-out Armed Forces. The fact is that the war in Ukraine is not being won and, if it were lost, President Putin would not stop there. We are in a 1938 situation. It is not just Ukraine's security at stake; it is ours. I believe that, if told the truth about what is at stake and what we must do, the country would not balk at the bill. I warmly welcome the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, to his new role. He is well known here and at NATO for telling hard truths, and I hope that he will do so.

Looking further afield, and here I pick up the point of the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, I hope that Labour realises how much the world has changed since the party was last in office and how much we have lost the global South. In 1990, when Kuwait was invaded, the UN resolution to condemn Saddam Hussein carried unanimously. In 2022, when Ukraine was invaded, while only four countries supported President Putin, 35 chose not to condemn him. I have to tell the noble Lord, Lord Howell, that the 35 included representatives of over half the population of the Commonwealth. Since then, the arithmetic has worsened with our refusing to condemn what is seen as genocide in Gaza and our ignoring what is happening in the Horn of Africa, where more are dying than in Ukraine and Gaza put together. We are seen as being hypocritical. The diplomatic disaster of March 2022 should have been a wake-up call.

What lessons should the Labour Government draw? First, it was unwise to hollow out our diplomatic posts in the global South; the Chinese did not. Secondly, cutting the BBC World Service was a false economy; RT in Moscow and CGTN in Beijing are expanding—no more cuts to the World Service, please. But there is a bigger underlying cause for the West's declining influence in what is seen as our hypocrisy. The manifesto asserts that we will

“work with allies to build, strengthen and reform”

the global multilateral institutions. Quite—that is the point. The UN Security Council composition reflects the realities of half a century ago. The IMF director is still always a European. The World Bank president is still always an American. America rejects the ICC and paralyses the WTO court. The dollar's exorbitant privilege is evermore resented. The bill for fighting global warming is seen as unfairly skewed, and western diplomatic aid is shrinking and comes with too many patronising strings and costly consultants.

[LORD KERR OF KINLOCHARD]

There are some—the disrupters—who reject the whole idea of international law, but most of the global South follow the Chinese and want reform. They want rules that are modernised, and so should we. If the Labour Government are up to that challenge, progressive realism will mean something very important.

1.25 pm

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friends who have made the transition from Opposition to Government swiftly and highly successfully. They are good, clever people and the country and its defence are in good hands.

Secondly, I have to make an apology. On 25 April this year, I asked a question in the House of the noble Earl, Lord Minto, and inadvertently omitted to preface my question with a reference to my main entry in the register of interests. I apologise to the House for that error and refer today to my current and more innocent entry.

As many noble Lords have said, the gracious Speech says that

“my Government will conduct a Strategic Defence Review”.

As so many have already said, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence have asked me to lead that review, along with General Sir Richard Barrons and Dr Fiona Hill. With great pleasure, we have agreed to do that.

This will be my second strategic defence review but probably the more difficult. The world has changed dramatically since the last one in 1998 and, in the intervening period, the range of challenges, threats, complications, instabilities and fragilities has multiplied. The sheer volatility of events in the world today has combined with the velocity of dynamic change to produce new vulnerabilities in our society. We must all face that new global turbulence with serious intent. Therefore, our Armed Forces must be agile, lethal, survivable and robust enough to deter any threat to our country. That is the imperative.

I do not intend to give a running commentary during the period of the review. After all, we are out to listen and consider, but not yet to proclaim. I just make two brief points. First, we invite the maximum input to our review, including from parliamentarians. I am conscious that Select Committees of both Houses will not be able to give us an early submission, but they will be taken into account. What we mainly seek in this review, from all people, are solutions and frankness about the choices before us. We all know the problems. However, we need honesty about the answers and the trade-offs that are involved in confronting these problems, and we would like to hear all views on that. Send your views to SDR-Secretariat@mod.gov.uk.

Secondly, we and the country need to recognise that the threats to our country and citizens are no longer theoretical. They are no longer a distant possibility. They are alive and well in Ukraine today. Vladimir Putin's Russia has brutally invaded and sought to occupy a peaceful neighbouring independent sovereign nation state. Anybody who needs reminding of what is at stake in the world today needs look only at the depraved conduct of Putin's occupiers in those parts of the Donbass and Crimea that they presently and

temporarily occupy. In that changed world, we have to look afresh at how we keep our people safe from that grim reality and other deadly and disruptive threats—not just now but for decades to come. It is a daunting task for this review, but I hope that we will help point a way towards a more secure and safer future.

1.29 pm

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Con): My Lords, I remind your Lordships' House of my interests with the Ministry of Defence. What a pleasure it is to be able to follow the noble Lord, Lord Robertson. The greatest compliment I can give him is to tell him of the collective sigh of relief that went around the MoD when he was appointed, and the thought that there was a grown-up in charge of this review. Equally, I question whether we can continue to prioritise both NATO and the Asia-Pacific. If we are forced to make a choice, I hope that it is NATO, not least because of the potential change of government in the United States at the end of the year. I am sure that he will be the right man to make that unbiased decision.

I will say a few words on the SDR and perhaps look at it through the traditional grand strategy lens of ends, ways and means. I am delighted that it is threat-based. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, outlined the threats very eloquently, and I do not wish to repeat them. As an aside, I thank him for his call-out to an increased Army Reserve. I am delighted to report to your Lordships' House that, during the last period, the Army Reserve did indeed increase in size, albeit very modestly.

Equally, I emphasise that, while we have woken the Russian bear, I am concerned that Russia is showing a degree of national resilience that I am not sure that we, the UK, could. It has very much put its economy on to a war footing, and we need to be very mindful of that. But what could and should we do? To me, we are a medium-sized MoD with a medium-sized budget. How do we get the most out of that budget?

To me, the answer is multidomain integration. The sign of any first-tier military is how it combines its domains. We have exquisite assets in land, air and sea, we lead the world in cyber, and we are developing on space. But operating in the joint space—where you combine those five domains together, rather like five strands of a rope—the strength is so much greater than the individual strands. We do that effectively, but we need to go one step further with multidomain integration.

That is easy to say, but what does it mean? To give a simplistic example, in the joint world a soldier on the front line may identify a target and then, through data or voice, call in an air strike or naval gunfire support or send it back to headquarters and have an artillery strike, and he may correct fire, and the target is eventually destroyed. With multidomain integration, the data that the sensors in the Ajax strike vehicle pick up is immediately shared with the F35 overhead, the Type 45 warship, or back to headquarters. Through artificial intelligence, the right asset to target that potential foe is identified, its threat is assessed as to where it should be in a priority, the strike is carried out, the fire is automatically corrected using a minimum amount of ammunition, and the whole process, rather than taking

minutes, takes seconds. But it does not end there. The expenditure of ammunition is automatically sent back through the logistical train, initiating resupply, and back into the land industrial base. This is how we maximise our advantage.

On means, we focus on 2.5% but let us be clear: if we had 2.5% today, it would not solve our problems in the short term. For the next four years, we would still have a deficit in money in defence. From year five onwards, according to the Public Accounts Committee, we would probably then have headroom. But we continue to have principal challenges.

The first is nuclear: about 6% of our operational budget is taken up by it. We do not actually know how much the nuclear programme costs. We ring-fenced money for the Dreadnought submarines, but other aspects continue to grow. When the nuclear programme sneezes, the rest of defence catches a cold. I think the time has come when nuclear needs to be held outside the defence budget. I would rather have 2% without nuclear than 2.5% with it.

There has been much speculation about Tempest. I remind your Lordships' House that we have signed a treaty on Tempest with Italy and Japan. How do we deal with that? The answer, of course, is that we need to go out and get more partners to join that programme so that we can temper the spending.

Finally, and very quickly, I pick up a point made earlier today by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, on revenue spending within the MoD. Revenue spending is the most vulnerable, yet it is the most important. If we do not have revenue to train, we cannot be a world-class military and cannot compete. While we do not know what the spending announcement of the pay rise for our servicemen will be, for every 1% it is £100 million. If we get, say, a 4% increase in spending, that is £400 million straight out of the revenue budget. We need to look carefully at how we balance capital and revenue spending within our defence budget.

1.35 pm

Lord Empey (UUP): My Lords, like other noble Lords, I congratulate our new Ministers on their appointments, but I also congratulate their immediate predecessors. We have been treated this morning to the menu in Annabel's kitchen—the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie's—but she cooked pretty good when she was on the other side of the House, so we have to thank her for her work.

They say that there is not a lot new under the sun. Well, I was just looking up what was happening in June 2010, when the previous Government came into office and launched their review under the guidance of the then Defence Secretary, Dr Fox. The release at the time said that this review was

“to deliver and support the sort of foreign policy this country needed”.

Dr Fox said that

“we would have to confront the harsh facts of the economic climate in which we operate”.

It went on to say that the SDR

“will make a clean break from the military and political mindset of Cold War politics”.

Really? Looking at what is happening in Ukraine, far from the Cold War, we are back to the Somme. Therefore, I think we really need a root-and-branch review of this. It is good news that our colleague here, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, is leading that, but we also have to bear in mind that the new Chief of the Defence Staff told us that we needed to be prepared for war in three years, though he said that there is no inevitability.

I will focus on what the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, said at the beginning of her remarks about this mythical 2.5% or 2% or whatever. Who says that 2.5% is going to deliver? If you are going to do a strategic review, you do a strategic review. But if the envelope is already sitting there with your boundaries before you even start, it is not a strategic review. The question therefore is: what do we need in the modern world to defend ourselves? If we are starting—to coin a phrase—with the bat of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, being broken in the pavilion before he gets on to the pitch, that would be the wrong direction of travel. I think we need to do it strategically, and to come back and tell people what it means. That may not be palatable—we all want to see certain elements of welfare improve, to see people looked after in health and education—but everybody agrees, and this Government and the previous Government agreed, that the key priority for every Government is the protection of their people, their way of life and our values. I hope that the review by the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, will not be constrained simply by arithmetic. Let us see what it is. If the Government, Parliament and all of us decide not to take the advice and have a different mechanism for arithmetic, that is fine. But let us at least get it out there and open in public.

I also wanted to raise, and mentioned to the Minister in advance, one local issue—I suppose all politics is local. My hometown, Belfast, has the Harland & Wolff shipyard. It is not the business side of that arrangement that I want to focus on but the infrastructure side. The only other alternative that we depend on for a lot of our repairs is at Rosyth, in Fife. If that is overwhelmed with demand or damaged by an enemy, where do we go?

I ask the Minister to let us know that the Government are focused on the fact that Harland has a strategic asset and piece of infrastructure that is necessary to protect our country in the future, and that we are not going to be sidetracked by short-term business considerations. I wanted to make that point because not only are we concerned, obviously, about the jobs and the business, but the type of infrastructure in place there cannot instantly be replaced in any other location. We wish the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, well. I have little doubt that if the review can be done in the time available, that itself will be a bit of a breakthrough, but we simply do not have the time left.

1.40 pm

Lord Jay of Ewelme (CB): My Lords, it is a pleasure as always to follow the noble Lord, Lord Empey. I join others first of all in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on their appointments.

[LORD JAY OF EWELME]

As others have said, and it is a view I share, the world is more uncertain and dangerous now certainly than at any time I can remember: the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, the simmering tension in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah as a proxy for Iran, the appalling conflict in Sudan—alas, often almost ignored—and the constant and at times resurgent struggle between democracy and, in Russia and China, autocracy.

Other contributors to this debate have spoken and will speak about those dangers. I will concentrate on the role the United Kingdom can play, with others, in responding to and confronting them. We have, in our Armed Forces, our Diplomatic Service, our experience and our global vision, huge assets, but there is little we can do on our own. We need to exert and increase our influence and effect by working with and through others. That is easy to say, but much harder to do.

We have a close but sometimes tense relationship with the United States. Any attempt to foretell what might happen in November is unwise, but if next January we have another Trump presidency, the tensions will almost certainly increase, as will the unpredictability. At the least, we may see a return to that streak of isolationism that has characterised American policy at times in the past. The implications are hard to predict, but they may well be serious for the war in Ukraine, and indeed for NATO and the European Union. In these circumstances, I hope the Government will argue powerfully for the United States to remain a key NATO partner, and urge other NATO partners to reach or exceed the 2% spending target. By all means, let us consider exactly what 2% or 2.5% means, but let us increase rather than decrease it. The planned defence review is sensible, and I wish the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, well, but it is the results that stem from it that really matter.

Global uncertainty today, and uncertainty in the United States, shows clearly the need to rebuild our relationship with the European Union—not inside it, but alongside it. Again, that is easier said than done. There are, not for the first time, strains within the EU, and they will not give us something for nothing. But it is strongly in our own interests to work with the EU on foreign and security policy, perhaps through a more structured relationship—provided, of course, that it is not too bureaucratic and is consistent with NATO. I hope that will lead to a more constructive relationship with the EU on other issues too.

I hope too that the Government will contribute all they can to the United Nations, not only in New York but through other UN organisations, including on development aid and humanitarian assistance. It is easy to deride the UN, but without it the world would be even more dangerous.

Finally, I turn to climate change. CHOGM takes place in October this year in Samoa. For many Commonwealth island nations, climate change is not theoretical; it is a matter of survival. COP 29 takes place in Azerbaijan in November this year—not just the latest in a seemingly endless series of meetings, but a chance to show, as at CHOGM, that we really do take climate change seriously, as we must, and will encourage others to do so too. Indeed, as the noble

Baroness, Lady Goldie, said in her remarks, the Government have said that they plan to initiate an international “clean power alliance” to accelerate the global energy transition. Perhaps the Minister can say more about this.

Taking an active, positive and sustained role in international affairs, working with others, is wholly in line with Britain's traditions. I wish the Government well.

1.45 pm

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (Lab): My Lords, I much welcome in the gracious Speech the explicit pledge to advance a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although it seems to be slightly out of favour with commentators currently, and, of course, as we heard earlier, with the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice. However, a two-state solution remains the only viable path to ensure Israel's security and to preserve its identity as both a Jewish and democratic state, while also satisfying the legitimate demand of the Palestinian people for self-determination and national sovereignty. This vision has been a cornerstone of diplomatic efforts for decades. Its principles were notably embodied in the Oslo accords. In the current context, it can be easy to forget the vision of the Oslo accords in the 1990s, which envisaged a framework for direct negotiations leading to lasting peace.

In December 1993, I accompanied the leader of the Opposition, the late John Smith, on an official visit to Jerusalem. We met Prime Minister Rabin, Foreign Minister Peres and the Palestinian leaders. There was a cautious hope and optimism. It seemed that everywhere you looked there were meetings of Israeli and Palestinian businessmen and entrepreneurs planning development and investment in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank, in a co-operating economic area. It is heartbreaking to compare that with the dark, medieval barbarism of 7 October and the consequent suffering in Gaza.

However, we must confront the stark reality that this former vision is under severe threat. The destabilising actions of the Iranian regime and its proxies have worked tirelessly to disrupt any and all peace efforts since the 1990s. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, through its support of terrorist proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis, continues to spread violence and instability in the whole region. These groups, acting as Iran's proxies, have consistently sought to derail any progress towards a peaceful resolution. In opposition, the Labour Party committed to look at legislation to proscribe the IRGC as a terrorist organisation. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's comments last week:

“I stand by what I said at the Dispatch Box when I was Opposition spokesman on these matters, and I will work over the coming months to review the context of terrorist activity and state threats with the Home Secretary.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 19/7/24; col. 304.]

I hope to hear soon about a timescale for all this.

I urge the Government and colleagues across the House to bolster our diplomatic efforts, working alongside our international partners, to reinvigorate a meaningful peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It will demand very courageous political leadership on all sides to try to achieve this. The two-state solution is not only the best solution but the only solution.

1.50 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, it makes no sense either to deny or condone the fact that the recent election campaign was, to all intents and purposes, a foreign policy-free zone—and that at a time when both main parties agree that the risks to our security and the challenges to the rules on which it is based, from those in the UN and Paris charters to those in the Geneva conventions on international humanitarian law, are higher than they have been for decades. A hard fact is that, although foreign policy may not be a high priority in most people's eyes, hard choices on foreign and security policy will be thrust upon us in the period ahead. Today's debate is an opportunity to remedy that lapse.

The two foreign and security policy issues that stand out in the gracious Speech—the reset of the UK's relationship with its European partners and the proposal for a new security pact to strengthen co-operation on the mutual threats faced by the UK and the EU—seem to me to be worthy of wholehearted support and to measure up to the challenges of the day. The security pact, interpreting the word “security” in the widest sense to include aspects of law enforcement, merits the greater priority, not because it hinges on the outcome of the US election—it will be needed whoever wins that election—but because the ruler of Russia continues to insist on his right to seize by force large parts of Ukraine, a country whose territorial integrity and sovereignty were guaranteed by Russia in the 1990s in the Budapest memorandum when Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapon. This flagrant breach of international law threatens our security and that of our fellow Europeans.

How long will it take to achieve those two objectives, and in what form and substance? It is far too soon to say or even to speculate, but I suggest that the Government might do well to engage in an in-depth process of exploratory talks with the EU and its member states before tabling proposals or entering negotiations. I hope that the issue of youth mobility will be included in that probing period, because it is not free movement, as some people say it is. The watchword throughout our reset must be to realise mutual benefits to all concerned—the very reverse of cherry picking. The Prime Minister seems to have made a good start on that at the NATO and European Political Community summits. Just remember, as we go along, the Chinese saying that the longest journey begins with the first step.

If we have learned nothing else from the horrendous events in and around Gaza from last October onwards, it is surely that neither Israel nor Palestine can hope to achieve security or prosperity without a two-state solution. It is to be hoped that the Government will throw their full weight behind the recent UN Security Council resolution designed to bring about an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and a massive increase in humanitarian aid. On that last point, I welcome very much the decision to resume our funding for UNRWA. I hope that the Government will act with real determination against any party which rejects that UN Security Council resolution or last week's ruling of the International Court of Justice. As to the recognition of Palestinian statehood, would that not best be achieved

alongside the recognition of Israel's statehood by those of its Arab neighbours that have not already done so at the outset of renewed negotiations for a two-state solution, so that recognition does not again become a hostage to the outcome of those negotiations?

In conclusion, it is good that the gracious Speech recognises the urgency of global climate change. What is needed now is not so much more warm words at successive COP meetings as the implementation of national commitments already entered into, our own included. It is also essential to strengthen the capacity of the World Health Organization to respond rapidly and equitably to the next global pandemic when it comes along, as it will do, and to catch up the ground lost in making progress on the UN sustainable development goals, not least by moving our own ODA contributions back towards the 0.7% of GNI to which we committed ourselves under law.

A challenging period lies ahead. We should do our best to rise to the occasion.

1.55 pm

Lord Blencathra (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to see the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in the Minister of State's position. I have long admired his robust style and over the last few years I have often said to myself, “What a good Tory speech that was. I wish we'd said that”. I suspect that has killed off both our chances of further promotion.

In the late 1970s I exercised in Germany as a volunteer soldier in the magnificent 51st (Highland) Division, waiting for the Soviets to invade. That never happened because, thanks to Ronnie Reagan and Margaret Thatcher bringing in cruise missiles and then negotiating disarmament from a position of strength, they brought down the wall and destroyed the Soviet Union.

We thought things were dangerous then but, in my 55 years involved in politics, this is the most dangerous time I ever recall. Back then we had mutually assured destruction and neither side wanted to press the nuclear button, but can we say the same thing now with the mad Islamists running around? Would they think it worth while to nuke Israel even if their half their country was destroyed in retaliation? I simply do not know. Or take Kim Jong-un in North Korea: we have ignored him since he is 5,500 miles away but, now that he along with Iran is supplying weapons to Putin, he is aiding and abetting genocide and war in our own back yard.

Of course, the threat from China is far greater than from Russia. The Chinese do not intend a war with the West because they think we will surrender before then. They aim to defeat us in three ways: first, with military superiority so the US will not dare to get into a long and bloody war with them; secondly, they expect to destroy us economically, so we in the West must reduce our serious dependency on Chinese goods, especially products essential to our survival; and, thirdly, they are destroying us politically. Our universities have prostrated themselves at the feet of Chinese money, letting the PRC intimidate Chinese students here, and they have taken over a host of United Nations and other international organisations. When we add together military, economic and political superiority, we can

[LORD BLENCATHRA]

say that China poses the greatest threat to our western liberal and democratic order that the world has ever seen.

The last of the countries in this dangerous quartet is Russia. Ukraine is fighting a war against Russia that we in the rest of Europe no longer have to fight. It is therefore vital that Russia is defeated, because if Russia wins or gets some fake, stalemate peace, Moldova will be next, followed by the Baltic states.

The war against Ukraine started in 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea and we in the West did absolutely nothing about it. There were vacuous noises from Obama, Germany bought even more gas and Putin got a green light for further aggression. Now we are hard pushed to give Ukraine all the weapons it needs for victory—but it could have been worse. In 2016 only five NATO countries out of 31 spent 2% on more on defence, with eight of them spending under 1%, including the wealthiest countries in Europe. Then in 2016 President Trump called NATO “obsolete” and asked why America should pay to defend us. Like it or not, he was right. His comments rightly scared most NATO countries, so last year 23 paid more than 2%, but eight were still down at 1%. Now Trump has said that it is not America’s job to defend Europe from Russia—and I am afraid he is right again. However, only the USA can save Europe from Russia, and we need to beg him to change his mind to get continued US support until Europe is in a position to defend itself—if he is elected.

I have only one question for the Minister, and this was touched on earlier at Questions. Russia is firing missiles from inside Russia that kill civilians and destroy infrastructure in Ukraine, but we permit Ukraine to fire back only missiles that do not hit Russian missile sites but destroy more of Ukraine’s own infrastructure. Why in the name of God are we tying our hands like that? If it is the case that the last Government also had the same policy, it was equally silly and lily-livered. Let the Ukrainians destroy Russian sites with whatever missiles we give them.

I am worried about the situation in the United States. The extreme-left media there—like the *New York Times* and CNN—have all conspired with the Democrats over the last four years to cover up Biden’s mental decline. So long as Biden was ahead in the polls, they all pretended that he was fully compos mentis. Now we will have six more months of a President who we are told is awake only between 10 in the morning and four in the afternoon, and that is not good for the peace of the world.

On the Middle East, I stand four-square behind Israel in its attempt to eradicate the evil Hamas terrorist organisation. I deplore those who were marching in our streets on 8 October, one day after the attack, celebrating the massacre of Israelis and calling for an intifada revolution. That was a full three weeks before Israel launched its ground assault. My only question for the Minister is this: I understand that the Foreign Secretary is calling for an immediate ceasefire and the release of hostages. I worry, perhaps wrongly, about the order of that. Will he confirm today that it is Labour Party policy that we get the

release of the hostages and then an immediate ceasefire? That is my view, and I hope it is the Government’s view too.

2 pm

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, today I intend to focus on defence, but of course defence and foreign policy are so closely aligned that it is sometimes difficult to do that.

As highlighted in the gracious Speech, and as many speakers have already mentioned, we live in a very dangerous and volatile world. Global threats are increasing. I would go so far as to say that we are already at war in the grey zone with Russia. That is ongoing, if you look at cyberattacks. Using weapons of mass destruction on the soil of another country is a pretty serious thing. Russia has done that to our country.

The Prime Minister has reaffirmed that the defence and security of the nation and our people is the first and most important duty of any Government. That is great; all Governments seem to say that. He has embarked on a strategic defence review. I have been on the active list of 59 years now—noble Lords might not believe it, considering how young I look—so you must excuse my nervousness over defence reviews. With the exception of one, which was conducted by my noble friend Lord Robertson, I am afraid that during those 59 years they have all cited efficiency savings, but those are effectively reductions in military capability. There has certainly never been an increase in defence spending. As the noble Lord, Lord Empey, said, it is extraordinary that, rather being told to look at what you really need, you are told, “You have exactly this amount of money. Stick within it”. I understand that it is important that something has to be affordable, but there needs to be a balance.

The SDR is necessary for our Government for a number of reasons—not least to ascertain how bad things have become, because I do not think we were given full visibility of how bad they were—but I do not think that anyone with the slightest knowledge of defence could believe anything other than that there is a pressing need for an enhanced budget now. It is quite clear that our forces have been hollowed out and that enhancement needs to come with immediate effect, not least for infrastructure, training, replenishment of spares and weapons stock.

Planning for a structure and force levels for a future conflict is all well and good, but the enemy has a vote too—we must not forget that—and he might not want to wait until we are perfectly prepared to fight him. He may well punch you on the nose before that. In fact, my experience of warfare is that that is exactly what they do. The huge pressure on government resources is recognised—obviously there are real problems—but if the defence and security of our nation and people is the first and most important duty of any Government, it rather trumps any other spending at the time when the risk becomes so great.

It is important that the review does not ignore the fact that we are an island nation. In the final analysis, our nation’s wealth and survival depends on the maritime, as it has done for centuries. The loss of open access to the sea would be catastrophic. So much of our security and wealth is linked to the maritime, not just merchant

shipping, which we run from London. There are the fibre-optic cables running on the seabed, as mentioned by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, transacting the vast bulk of global business. Offshore oil and gas infrastructure and gas pipelines are critical to this nation's energy supplies. Continental powerlines and offshore wind farms ensure that we have sufficient electrical supplies, with a huge demand for electricity coming down the track.

The review has been directed to ensure the primacy of the NATO alliance in our defence posture. This makes absolute sense, but we should be clear that the most important contribution the UK makes to NATO is maritime forces. The case for enhancement and investment in the Royal Navy is made even more compelling by the strength of European NATO allies on land and in the air and the limits of their strength at sea. The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO and Poland's army expansion programme alone will see 20 extra brigades and 120 fast jets added to NATO's terrestrial and air strength. There is no such naval growth.

The UK leads and should continue to lead efforts to enact sea control in the Euro-Atlantic to protect Britain and Europe's maritime lifelines in support of NATO. The inherent mobility and flexibility of sea power means that the forces doing those NATO jobs can contribute to sea denial in the Indo-Pacific and the mouth of the Gulf, confronting Iran, as well as to deterring the PRC from using military power.

To protect the UK and NATO interests, and to help to uphold international order at sea, the Royal Navy requires ships, submarines, clear planning of industrial war potential, shipbuilding, weapons supply chains and enhancements to platform survivability and lethality. To encapsulate that, I will, believe it or not, yet again say: more ships.

2.05 pm

The Lord Bishop of Winchester: My Lords, I am grateful for the noble Baroness's remarks at the start and am pleased that the Government have expressed a desire to reset the UK's international relations. If the UK is to exercise the soft power that we undoubtedly might, not least through proper investment in the BBC World Service, it is vital that we are as fully engaged internationally as we can be. In that regard, I stress the vital importance of freedom of religion or belief—or FoRB for short, because it is a mouthful—in today's world. It is a vital human right, and its increasing abuse is a growing global threat.

At a purely human level, consider some of the grave impacts of FoRB violations. Victims of religious persecution often experience severe psychological trauma. Constant fear and stress undermine both community well-being and personal health. Children who witness or experience such violence are affected throughout their lives, perpetuating cycles of trauma and fear. Women are particularly vulnerable in contexts of religious persecution, often facing sexual violence and multiple forms of exploitation, including people trafficking, forced conversion, and forced marriage—or rape by another name.

FoRB violations are a significant driver of displacement. Millions are forced to flee their homes to escape persecution, leading to immense humanitarian

challenges. It would be good to know whether the Government's latest initiatives in this area of migration recognise and address the violation of freedom of religion or belief as a significant factor driving migration. If not, they should. There is a link, too, with climate change. The past decade has seen a significant rise in both CO2 emissions and persecution in the world's two most populous countries: India and China. I suggest that that is no coincidence. I am not suggesting there is a causal relationship between the two, but I do suggest there is a moral relationship.

So this is not a side issue. In that regard, I am glad to see the reappearance of the Holocaust Memorial Bill, even as I recognise the sensitivity of the issue of the memorial's siting. The Holocaust remains an appalling reminder of the grave danger of abandoning the freedom of religion or belief.

Yet this right is under increasing threat today. Its biggest threat comes from overbearing, authoritarian and nationalistic Governments bolstered by their own particular ideology or, indeed, theology. Putin's regime in Russia is bolstered by "Russkiy mir"—meaning "Russian world" or, ironically, "Russian peace"—a theology shamefully expounded by the Russian Orthodox Church and roundly criticised elsewhere in Orthodoxy. President Xi's ambitions for Chinese hegemony are bolstered by the ancient concept of tianxia—literally, "all under heaven"—a geopolitical system with China at the centre and Xi at the centre of the centre.

Iran's leaders are motivated by an apocalyptic belief in the revelation of the 12th imam, a belief that feeds their violent repression at home and their violent activities abroad. In India, those close to President Modi expound and espouse the concept of "Akhand Bharat"—unbroken India, stretching from Afghanistan to Myanmar, encompassing Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and bolstered by Hindu fundamentalist theology. That is very bad news for the vast numbers of non-Hindu minorities within the greater whole. Indeed, all these theologies are bad news for minorities of every sort, and bad news therefore for the wider world. So the time for inaction and indifference is over.

Happily, the UK has a growing international reputation and role in this area. Following the Truro review, which I was honoured to author, and the changes to government policy it brought about, we have established the UK FoRB Forum, which gathers around 90 civil society actors to make common cause on this issue. Two years ago, the UK hosted a successful international ministerial conference on the issue and, last year, the UK co-sponsored for the first time a UN Security Council resolution on it.

Fiona Bruce, until recently MP for Congleton, held the role of the Prime Minister's special envoy on this subject with great energy and commitment and, as such, chaired the growing intergovernmental International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, of which the UK is a founder member.

I therefore encourage the Government to build on this foundation and take a faith-literate approach to foreign affairs. Looking at the world of today through western secular lenses will not do and simply makes us increasingly vulnerable. I encourage the Government

[THE LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER]

to make a fresh and speedy appointment of a special envoy for freedom of religion or belief; it is much needed. I have no doubt that embedding FoRB at the heart of foreign policy and appointing a special envoy will simply mean that we are more effective actors globally. In today's world, we cannot afford to be anything less.

2.10 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, in concurring with and endorsing everything that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester has just said to the House, I also welcome the two new Ministers to their places on the Front Bench.

I note the Prime Minister's promise, made at the NATO summit, to be "robust" with China over human rights and security concerns—for the sake of transparency, I should mention that I am a patron of Hong Kong Watch.

The noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, who has been asked to oversee the strategic defence review, has described China, Russia, Iran and North Korea as a "deadly quartet". They evoke for me the four apocalyptic horsemen, with their deadly mix of war, famine, plague and death. I hope that the noble Lord, in instigating his review, will begin by dusting down our own House of Lords reports, notably *UK Defence Policy: From Aspiration to Reality?* and the earlier report of the Select Committee on International Relations and Defence that looked at China, security and trade. Resources to implement those reviews and reports are needed urgently. The situation in Ukraine, the Middle East and the Far East, notably in the South China Sea with daily threats to Taiwan and the Philippines, demands it.

Notwithstanding unstinting admiration for the peoples and culture of China, do the Government see the Chinese Communist Party led by Xi Jinping as a severe threat to our security, as well as repressing the peoples under its control in the most cruel and inhumane ways? Do they concur with the earlier description by the previous Government of the CCP as representing an "epoch-defining challenge"?

Given that the Minister's party voted for the House of Commons resolution naming a genocide against the Uighurs, how will the Government bring the CCP to account? Will we ban the import of products made by forced labour in China, require British businesses manufacturing in or importing from China to ensure that their supply chains are free of slave labour and prohibit new trade agreements? Will the Minister explain the Energy Security Secretary's decision to approve the Mallard Pass solar farm, where Canadian Solar's panels are said to have been made by slave labour? Iusb know that is an issue close to the heart of the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, so I look forward to his reply on it later.

What about Hong Kong? Will we sanction those responsible for dismantling Hong Kong's promised freedoms, in total breach of the Sino-British joint declaration, reinforced by Article 23, a second draconian security law shredding what little remains of Hong Kong's civil liberties? At the earliest opportunity, will the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary meet

Sebastien Lai, the son of Jimmy Lai, a 76 year-old British citizen and entrepreneur who is in prison and whose health is deteriorating? Will we call for his immediate release, along with the release of Hong Kong's 1,800 pro-democracy prisoners?

In rightly welcoming escapees, will we immediately expel CCP diplomats if we see a recurrence of the shameful attack in 2022 when peaceful Hong Kong protesters were beaten up and dragged into the grounds of the Chinese consulate in Manchester? In our universities, what steps will the Government take to show that they are "robust" in defending our freedoms at home, especially academic freedom, by helping our higher education institutions reduce our dependency on China?

Let us take the case of Professor Michelle Shipworth from University College London, who was banned from teaching a course because she spoke about modern slavery in China, with the university saying that its "commercial interests" had been damaged. Professor Shipworth said in an email to me this week:

"It is heart-breaking that many/most Chinese students won't speak in class because they are frightened that other Chinese students could report them to the CCP for "wrong think"... Fear of the CCP (and loss of student fees that they control access to) stalks my classroom and department, reducing the quality of teaching and learning for everyone".

What are we going to do to tackle transnational repression and develop a range of tools to prevent infiltration, intimidation or harassment of both diaspora communities and prominent British critics of the CCP, including the sanctioning and harassment of Members of both Houses of Parliament? I declare an interest.

The Minister will recall my successful amendment on the curtailment of the use of Chinese surveillance cameras. Will he review what progress there has been in stripping out Hikvision surveillance cameras from government buildings and assess the surveillance dangers posed by Chinese electric vehicles?

If we are to be robust, actions and deeds must match our words.

2.15 pm

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Con): My Lords, I start by congratulating Labour on their win three weeks ago and the Ministers on their appointment. I canvassed hard in a number of seats held by the Conservatives and despite, or possibly because of, my endeavours on the street, and despite a record 35,000 steps in one day, we lost them all.

I do not normally speak on the foreign affairs day of the humble Address, as I tend to focus on economic and business matters, but it seems to me that we are now facing unique and unprecedented challenges in respect of our foreign policy and it is seeping into our domestic politics—to such an extent that some 500,000 of our His Majesty's subjects are represented by an MP who regards Gaza as the most pressing matter, to the point that some have claimed that their win is for Gaza alone. This is a very unsatisfactory situation for those in such constituencies who may regard their and their family's welfare and well-being at home as more important. So it is vital that the Government are very clear on where it stands on certain issues and do not send mixed messages, as may be the case.

In this respect, I would be grateful if the Minister could unequivocally advise us on the Government's stance on the International Criminal Court. Does the Minister agree that there is no moral equivalence between Hamas, responsible for the worst attacks on Jewish people since the Holocaust, and Israel? I was horrified to hear earlier on a suggestion of equivocality between the hostages and the criminals in jail in Israel. Accordingly, will HM Government continue to object the prosecutor's application for arrest warrants for democratically elected Israeli officials?

At this point, I refer your Lordships to my various declared interests in the Middle East and thank the Government of Qatar for inviting me to meet the Prime Minister while he was in London and their Foreign Secretary, Dr Mohamed Al-Khulaifi, among others in Doha.

As always in the Middle East, there are nuances that need to be understood and a huge amount of work that happens away from the public eye to try to resolve a very difficult situation. Naturally, I regard the release of the hostages as the absolute key and first step that must be implemented. Unlike some—and, I hope, like our Government—I do not believe this can be post ceasefire; it needs to happen now, and I hope the Minister shares my concern. We all recognise that, if the hostages are released now, the fighting will cease.

In the short time I have left, I want to concentrate on UNRWA. I have seen the work of Senator Chris Smith and the evidence that his committee has examined, showing how the Colonna report is a whitewash. Given Ms Colonna's previous position, this is not a surprise, but even her report conceded that UNRWA does not vet employees for connections or sympathies with Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

For many the whole premise of UNRWA is flawed; it is serving the great-grandchildren of the people it was meant to help, many of whom are in such dire circumstances only due to the failure of Arab states to allow their integration and former Arab leaders failing to agree a peace deal which was in their grasp.

Please be in no doubt that my heart goes out to the very many totally innocent victims in Gaza—and of course elsewhere, but particularly in Gaza—where the main organisation charged with helping them has in fact become twisted into inciting violence as an incubator of hatred, even to the point of encouraging children to “martyrdom” as suicide bombers. There will never be a two-state solution while this continues.

The monitoring group UN Watch disclosed that more than 3,000 UNRWA staff and teachers celebrated the 7 October attack on Telegram, praising murderers and rapists as heroes, and Hamas war rooms have been found in UNRWA's offices in Gaza City. Some of the hostages were held in the houses of UNRWA teachers—teachers who incite anti-Semitism and celebrate terrorism. I ask the Minister for categorical assurances that the very controversial decision to recommend funding UNRWA will be properly monitored and, most importantly, that genuine efforts will be made to find alternative and better routes to provide aid.

In conclusion, I have been to the border pass at Kerem Shalom, I have seen the lorries piled up and I have listened to the evidence of looting and theft by

Hamas of aid which is so desperately needed by the innocent victims. Deflecting the blame to Israel misses the point. Of course there have been catastrophic mistakes on all sides, but one party is in Gaza to prevent future terrorism and the other is there to promote it. We need to be clear where we stand and protect our taxpayers' money from abuse and waste. As the London *Times* said this week:

“UNRWA is only indispensable to Hamas, not ordinary Palestinians”.

2.20 pm

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, an incoming Government inevitably consider that their predecessor got most things wrong, but the Prime Minister has already conceded that on some issues—Ukraine, for example—his Administration will continue the policy of the last Government. Given the things they said in opposition, I assume that the Government agree with the previous Foreign Secretary's assertion that

“the lights are absolutely flashing red ... on the global dashboard”.

The accuracy of the last Administration's analysis was, unfortunately, not matched by the adequacy of their response. I fear that this, too, is an area where the new Government seem tempted to tread the same path as their predecessor. They have committed to increasing the defence budget to 2.5% of GDP. Why? Presumably, it is because they have correctly reached the conclusion that the current budget is insufficient in light of the circumstances in which we find ourselves as a nation and as an alliance. But we find ourselves in those circumstances now, not at some indeterminate point in future, so saying that “Defence expenditure will be increased, but not now” is completely illogical.

Some might say that we cannot increase the defence budget until the defence review has reported and set out how the money should be spent. This argument fails on a number of counts. Do we need a defence review to tell us that Putin is a clear and present danger, that there is a growing strand of isolationism in America whatever the outcome of the forthcoming presidential election, that weapons stocks across the Armed Forces are perilously low, that the Armed Forces are failing to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of the engineers and technicians on which modern military capability so crucially depends or that the current defence budget is inadequate to address these issues? The answer to these questions is no. In truth, the defence review will need to set out how far and quickly we should go beyond 2.5% of GDP and the balance of investment to be made in future capabilities. It cannot wish away the current deficiencies, which are so pressing in light of the present threat and which require urgent investment.

I have the greatest respect for the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, who is leading the review. He conducted a similar and well-regarded exercise in 1997-98 when Defence Secretary. Unfortunately, the Treasury refused to fund it adequately, to the tune of between £500 million and £1 billion per year. It was in trouble almost from the moment it left the starting blocks—and then we were spending 2.6% of GDP on defence, which would equate to an even higher figure today, given changes in accounting practices.

[LORD STIRRUP]

The mantra seems to be that we will increase the defence budget when fiscal conditions allow. This reflects an amazingly unrealistic view of international relations. Much though we may regret it, the world will not wait upon our pleasure. Putin will not wait upon our pleasure. I suppose we could send him a note saying: "Dear Vladimir, we know that you're a dire threat to the peace and security of Europe, but would you mind holding off until we get the books straight?" I doubt that he would pay attention. Given the lessons that Russia has learnt from the war in Ukraine and the extent of its military expenditure, we have perhaps five years to put NATO's own house in order. We will need every minute of those five years to redress the hollowing out of the Armed Forces that has been the dominant feature of recent decades.

I suspect that the Minister might agree with much of this, no matter how straight a bat he may of necessity play in winding up. My remarks are aimed less at him, and more at the occupants of Downing Street. I urge them to heed the words of Shakespeare's Richard II, as he languished imprisoned and uncrowned in Pontefract Castle. Having squandered his many opportunities, he lamented:

"I have wasted time, and now doth time waste me".

It concerns me not at all if politicians are wasted by their squandered opportunities, but it concerns me greatly when it is the security of this country and its people that they risk wasting.

2.25 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on their appointments. I also want to record my thanks to my noble friends Lord Cameron and Lord Ahmad.

I welcome His Majesty's Government ambitious vision for our country, in particular improving our relationship with our European partners. Peace in Europe is broken. In Ukraine, war is raging and people are dying. People are at risk in the western Balkans, where the Kremlin has successfully recruited proxies to subvert progress and the achievements of the last 30 years.

Much is at stake. If Ukraine's territorial integrity is at risk, no country in Europe can feel safe. Our continued support for Ukraine is crucial, and the Government's clarity on this is welcome. However, I am concerned that Russia's malign actions and hybrid operations elsewhere in Europe are being ignored. In the words of Foreign Secretary Bevin, the Balkan region is the "powder keg of Europe", yet the West's response to the Kremlin's meddling is muted and inconsistent, bordering on appeasement.

The Defence Secretary stated this week that European security will be this Government's first foreign and defence policy. This is welcome. I would argue that, if we seriously want to reset relations with Europe, we must engage in the European neighbourhood and shore up the areas of greatest threat to our common security—Foreign Secretary Bevin's powder keg. That points inevitably to bringing our policy towards the western Balkans in line with our wider strategy towards

Russia, to prevent secessionism and forced border changes. In the spirit of upholding this European security, will the Government commit to reinforcing the military deterrent in Bosnia and Herzegovina by rejoining Operation Althea and increasing our support for NATO HQ in Sarajevo? Both are in our gift and in our interest.

My second point of inconsistency in our policy concerns Israel and Gaza. Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel was cowardly. Taking hostages, perpetrating violence against women and killing civilians are unacceptable. So too is anti-Semitism. It is never to be tolerated. At the same time, we must value people's lives equally. No child in Gaza is less of a child or less of a human than a child in Tel Aviv. No family, no home, no school, no hospital, no water supply, no religious building is a legitimate target anywhere—in Israel, Ukraine or Gaza. We are complacent, and we are in danger of being complicit if we do not treat them equally, let dehumanization become normalized and international humanitarian law be disregarded.

I welcome the Government's decision to reinstate the funding to UNRWA, but we surely have to go further. How is it that a bombing of a school in Ukraine deserves full condemnation from the Prime Minister, yet attacks on Gaza schools, where refugees seek respite and protection, do not? There are no consequences either. According to UNICEF, 10 amputations are carried out on children in Gaza each day. In some cases, it is the last resort. We have rightly welcomed with open arms sick children from Ukraine, yet not a single visa has been granted to a wounded child from Gaza—not even one. For nine months, I have pleaded unsuccessfully with my colleagues in the previous Government to do the humane thing. Can the new Government put this right? How is it that we can secure the supply of arms to Kyiv but we cannot secure a reliable and desperately needed supply of food and water to the starved and sick in Gaza?

I hope that the newly initiated Foreign Office review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law will come soon enough for people who, as the Foreign Secretary has said,

"are trapped in hell on earth".—[*Official Report, Commons, 19/7/24; cols. 301-2.*]

—which of course includes the hostages—and that it will not be a post-mortem but a new direction.

Finally, I too welcome the appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, to lead the strategic defence review. I am a great fan of his and of Dr Hill and General Barrons; their experience is unrivalled. They need none of my input, but if I may, I urge the noble Lord and his impressive team that the goal must not only be the strengthening of our Armed Forces but also of the foundations of our country's ability to uphold an open and resilient international order, in which protecting human rights is not just a convenient phrase but a consistent basis for promoting humanity and protecting our national interest.

2.30 pm

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Non-Affl): My Lords, the King's Speech told us that measures will be introduced to improve the safety and security of public venues

and help keep the British people safe from terrorism. When we use the word “terrorism” nowadays, we usually mean Islamist terrorism. MI5 tells us that Islamist terrorism is now the UK’s most significant threat. Yet, if we so much as try just to talk about Islam or Islamism, we are immediately accused of Islamophobia. A phobia is an irrational fear of something, but it is not irrational to fear the modern world’s most violent religious ideology.

I describe it as such because, according to The Religion Of Peace’s website, Islamist terrorists have carried out 46,602 deadly terror attacks somewhere in the world since their twin tower massacres of 9 September 2001, or more than five every day. Just in the week from 6 to 12 July this year, there have been 35 attacks in 12 countries, killing 70 people and injuring 32. There are two broad divisions within Islam, as I am sure your Lordships know, between Sunni and Shia Muslims, with many sub-sects which do not often agree with each other, and the vast majority of these attacks have been on other Muslims.

I understand there is a popular conception that the word “Islam” means “peace”; whereas, in fact, it means “submission” to the will of Allah, or the Muslim God. Devout Muslims should obey the Koran and emulate the life of Muhammad. This is unfortunate, because the Koran contains over 100 verses which encourage Muslims to kill or subdue non-Muslims and, in 627, Muhammad ordered the death of 600 Jews in one afternoon.

The Islamists’ view of this is that peace will be achieved when our planet is ruled by Islam. Islam’s sharia law is already running de facto in the United Kingdom via some 80 Muslim arbitration tribunals. These discriminate harshly against Muslim wives, whose husbands have only to say “I divorce you” three times to leave them divorced and often destitute. The sharia allows Muslim men to have four wives at a time, most of whom are having at least two children, so the Muslim population is going up 10 times faster than our national average. On past trends, Birmingham and nine other English local authorities will be majority Muslim by 2031. The radicals’ plan is to wait until they can take us over through the power of the womb and the ballot box.

Of course, I pay tribute to the vast majority of Muslims in this country who eschew these tenets and live decent and helpful lives in our democracy, but we are left with the problem of what to do about the rest of them. May I suggest, first, that we should start monitoring our mosques and madrasas and imprison or deport our extremist Imams. Secondly, we should encourage the licensing of Imams before they can preach, as do other religions, including, I think, the Church of England. Thirdly, the Government should enact the Bill of the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, to give our Muslim wives the protection of our civil law. The Bill has had two supportive Second Readings in your Lordships’ House, but the Government fear being called “Islamophobic” by our Muslim men, so will not support it. Fourthly, we should ban the burka in public, as 16 other countries have done, some of which are Muslim majority.

Islam is a vast subject and I cannot possibly do it justice in the five minutes which is our allotted speaking time, but I have written a two-page, bullet-point memo entitled *Why Can't We Talk about Islam?*, which has found favour in unexpected quarters, and I will put a copy of it in your Lordships’ Library.

2.35 pm

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, I refer the House to my registered interests and I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker—who seems to have just nipped out—as well as the noble Lord, Lord Collins, who has been announced as Minister for Africa. I am sorry the noble Lord is not in his place because on 1 January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a landmark memorandum that promises to alter regional dynamics considerably. The agreement grants Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via the port of Berbera. Somaliland will lease a 20-kilometre stretch of coastline to Ethiopia for 50 years, and in return, Ethiopia has committed to recognising Somaliland as an independent state, making it the first United Nations member state to do so, a historic milestone. From Ethiopia’s perspective, the MoU highlights a strategic necessity. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has long needed reliable and cost-effective access to the sea to enhance trade, and this agreement addresses that economic need and enhances security.

The Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU is a landmark agreement with wide-reaching implications. It addresses crucial economic and security needs while setting a new path for regional diplomacy and international recognition. As we navigate these complex geopolitical landscapes, it is essential that we remain engaged and proactive in fostering stability and co-operation in the Horn of Africa. We must support the efforts of countries such as Somaliland and Ethiopia to bring stability in this region, and I look forward to working with the noble Lord, Lord Collins, on this matter going forward.

Iran has consistently pursued an expansionist agenda through its authoritarian, theocratic regime. It has propagated extremist policies in stark contradiction to western values and international law. The Islamic Republic of Iran extends its influence through proxies, as we know, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the Palestinian Territories, advancing its agenda via financial, military and political aid to its actors. The activities of the IRGC, which I have raised so many times on the Floor, but not yet from this side, have been mapped across all countries. In welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to the Front Bench, I wanted to remind him of the powers of his persuasion. He is not here, but I am sure the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, will remind him. There was a late-night trade Bill going through, and an amendment was put down by the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to proscribe the IRGC. I, together with my noble friend Lord Leigh—it was more difficult for him—marched through the Lobby with the noble Lord to ensure that the IRGC be proscribed. I may get used to that new Lobby. Anyway, I hope he will now use those powers of persuasion to do exactly what he called for, and proscribe the IRGC.

The Abraham Accords represent a transformative agreement with far-reaching implications for peace, prosperity and security in the Middle East. I urge His

[LORD POLAK]

Majesty's Government to continue to support and build on these developments, and I hope they will bring about the negotiating settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis. Can the Minister say what specific actions the Government will take to enhance and build on the Abraham Accords?

In conclusion, I ask all noble Lords here to imagine, just for one minute, that their son or daughter had been abducted by terrorists intent on murder and rape. Now imagine that feeling lasting nearly 300 days. Guy Gilboa-Dalal is a 22 year-old with a deep passion for Japan, with self-taught Japanese and dreams of visiting that country—a dream that was tragically halted on 7 October, when Guy was taken hostage by Hamas terrorists during the Nova music festival. Guy had been eagerly planning his first rave with friends and his brother, Gal, for months. Gal, who had attended another party earlier, drove to the festival and arrived at 5.30 am. The brothers met, they hugged, and took a selfie that Guy sent to their mum. Soon after, Hamas terrorists attacked. In the chaos, Guy decided to flee with his friends, while Gal headed back to his car. Gal spent hours running and hiding in bushes. Unfortunately, Guy was captured by the terrorists, a fact his family discovered later through a video.

Guy's parents, Merav and Ilan, are present with us in the Chamber today. They have not heard from their son since he was kidnapped and taken hostage in Gaza. They have had no communication, no updated photographs and no visits from the Red Cross in the 292 days since his capture. Their only sign of his existence came from a rescued hostage, who reported being held in the same room as Guy. This witness described severe physical and mental abuse, and minimal food and water provided by their captors. This scant information is the only source of hope for Guy's parents, while knowing that their son endures daily abuse, suffering and starvation. I implore His Majesty's Government to do everything in their power to support the hostage negotiations, and pressurise our friends in Egypt and Qatar, so that Guy and the other 120 hostages do not spend one more night in captivity.

2.41 pm

Baroness Suttie (LD): My Lords, I commend the noble Lord, Lord Polak, for that appeal. I associate these Benches with his appeal for the release of hostages.

I congratulate both noble Lords on the Government Front Bench and look forward to working with them. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, on his appointment to carry out the strategic review—that is no small challenge.

I am deeply relieved, as other noble Lords including the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, have said they are, by the reset of relations with the EU. One can begin to hope that the psychodrama we have been living through since 2016 is finally over, but I hope that the Government will soon feel able to be more ambitious about our relationship with the EU. Is it fair, for example, that today's young people and students, who did not vote for Brexit, have lost so many of the advantages of studying and working in EU countries? At the very least, I strongly urge the Government to rejoin Erasmus.

I will concentrate my remaining remarks on wider Europe and Ukraine. Like the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, I am very concerned by Putin's activities in the wider Europe. On Monday this week, I met a Georgian fellow of the John Smith Trust—I declare an interest as a trustee—who was telling me about the deeply worrying recent developments in Georgia. It is a country where young people, particularly, so much want to look west and become part of the European family, but where the current Government in Tbilisi are increasingly controlled by the Putin regime. There is a very real risk of more violence and the repression of civil society, the media and political opposition in the run-up to the elections in Georgia in October. The knock-on consequences for neighbouring Armenia would be profound. Can the Minister say whether there are any plans to impose targeted sanctions on high-level Georgians who are supportive of the Putin regime?

Young people in the Caucasus and central Asia want closer academic and business relations with the UK; they want an alternative to their big neighbours of China and Russia. Most of all, they want to know that we understand their security concerns. The noble Lord, Lord Cameron, should be commended for the work he started in this regard, and I urge the new Government to develop a comprehensive strategy towards the countries of the former Soviet Union, including central Asia. The John Smith Trust fellows have an extremely well developed network of young leaders across the region. I am sure they would be very happy to work on such a strategy with the Government.

I will conclude with a few remarks on Ukraine. The continued cross-party consensus on Ukraine is very welcome. It remains the most critical area of foreign and defence policy that this country faces. Ahead of the debate, this week I was in touch with some Ukrainian friends who are close to the Administration in Kyiv, and they asked me to highlight two key issues of concern.

The first is sanctions. There are too many loopholes, and it is debatable whether they are having sufficient impact on the Putin war economy. For too many Russians in the Putin regime, sanctions are just an occasional inconvenience. I believe the UK is extremely well placed to take a lead on a substantial review of sanctions, to see whether there are ways they can be strengthened to be smarter and more targeted against those who support and enable Putin's war of aggression against the people of Ukraine. The second area is the plight of the energy sector in Ukraine. Russia has consistently and cynically directed its missiles towards Ukrainian power stations. This has led to near-permanent power cuts. At the moment, power is on for two hours at a time in Kyiv and then switched off for five. There is an urgent need to build or rebuild power stations; my Ukrainian friends are already fearful of the winter ahead.

I know we already give generous financial contributions through the Ukraine energy support fund, but I urge the Minister to urgently do more to support the Ukrainian energy sector, including making it greener and more efficient—"building back better", as the Ukrainian Government like to say. It is an area where we could make a big difference, relatively quickly, and I would

be happy to meet the Minister to discuss this matter further. If the power stations are not rebuilt, Ukrainians will face another cold and dark winter, with many forced into another wave of emigration—perhaps as many as 5 million people. The effects on Ukrainian industry will be catastrophic in lost workforce and power. On this, as well as on so many other issues, Ukraine needs and deserves our urgent support.

2.46 pm

Lord McDonald of Salford (CB): My Lords, like the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, and other noble Lords, I welcome the new ministerial team and thank the old one, especially the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, who is sadly not in his place but is, magnificently, the longest-serving Foreign Office Minister since I joined the FCO in 1982. He had already clocked up three years by the time I left, four years ago.

In the war raging in the east of our continent, the UK's interest is that Ukraine does not lose and Russia does not win. We are committed to keeping Ukraine in the fight for as long as Ukrainians are willing to fight, but it is emphatically not in the UK's interest to join the fight. That being the case, I wondered why Ukrainian membership of NATO featured prominently in the gracious Speech. A country can ally itself with a country at war only if it is willing directly to participate in that war. The NATO summit in Washington two weeks ago made a more realistic short-term promise to increase NATO and Ukrainian interoperability. NATO membership is for later, when the fighting has stopped, and can be offered only if the UK and other allies are prepared to fight if the Russians break the armistice which will conclude this phase of the conflict.

Russia and Ukraine will dominate the defence review. Several noble Lords have spoken in favour of increasing defence spending beyond 2.5%, yet many other vital policy areas are also strapped for cash. Reviewers need to assure themselves that the Ministry of Defence is making best use of its existing budget. I note that the US Marine Corps is 30% bigger with 50% more aircraft than the UK's Armed Forces, yet costs 20% less.

I have a number of questions for the reviewers, who must first and foremost tackle our unwillingness to prioritise. Along with the noble Lord, Lord Lancaster, I ask: will they recognise that our region—Europe and the North Atlantic—is our absolute priority? If they do, what future do they foresee for the Indo-Pacific tilt? The two new aircraft carriers are no doubt marvels of engineering, but what essential function will they fulfil in the mid-21st century?

Will the nuclear deterrent be on the table? The deterrent is vastly expensive—so expensive that we never admit in public exactly how much it costs. Looking not too far into the future, we are likely to face a savage choice between contracting or expanding the deterrent. Because of the expense, and the possibility that nuclear might crowd out conventional capabilities that we might actually use, we need at least to consider contraction. In that context, will we revisit what we mean by minimum deterrent, the so-called Moscow criterion? All we require is for Moscow not to strike us. What we have is a maximalist version of minimum by assuming that only the prospect of obliteration of its well-defended capital would deter it.

We claim that our deterrent is independent, and yet its continued existence relies on the continuous good will of the United States. Can we be sure that the next US Administration will support us, as their predecessors have done for the last 60-plus years? If not, we must consider expanding the programme. Will we be prepared to do more by ourselves or with other Europeans? The French rely on American nuclear input more than they like to admit. Will we build on the Lancaster House agreements of 2010, signed by the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, and building on work initiated by Gordon Brown? Lastly, will we continue to strain to achieve the full spectrum of defence capabilities, or will we embrace greater mutual reliance with key European allies? This is a review crying out for close consultation with other Europeans, particularly France and Germany. I wish the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and his colleagues the best of luck as they grapple with these fundamental questions.

2.51 pm

Baroness Neville-Jones (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the Government on their electoral success. It is in the national interest that they succeed, and I wish them well. I want to talk briefly about three subjects. The first is the transatlantic world, which is not in the best of health. Until relatively recently, we could count on stable politics in our own alliance as a secure basis on which to respond to threats, challenges and the rest of the world, but that is no longer the case. The rise of nationalist populism in the United States is a threat to the viability of the alliance, which has kept the peace since the Second World War. If the United States declines to continue to support Ukraine militarily, UK and European security generally will be at great risk. I have no faith in fashionable alternatives to the transatlantic alliance, such as sovereign Europe. It is a pipe dream, and a bad one, since it will produce division and weakness in NATO.

The UK has an especially strong interest in holding the western alliance together. Over the years we have put a lot of eggs in that basket, and a close relationship with the US, as part of the wider Atlantic community, is part of the fabric of our own polity. No longer being in the EU means we are simultaneously less influential and more vulnerable to the effects of transatlantic disagreement and breaches of trust. My conclusion is that devoting resources to diplomacy in Washington is top of the list of priorities, since failure of the alliance will not just destroy our ability to deal with all the other wider threats that we confront in the Middle East and China; we will face the likelihood of a wider war in our continent.

Secondly, I turn to China. The integrated review recognised the challenge that China poses militarily, politically and economically, and the Conservative Government made an important and constructive move in AUKUS, which helps join the Atlantic and Pacific worlds and increases the credibility of a European contribution to the political and military scene in the Asia-Pacific. I belong to those who believe that we should try to contribute to that part of the world. I hope that, in conducting the defence review, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, in whom I have great confidence, is able to build on AUKUS.

[BARONESS NEVILLE-JONES]

There is no doubt that, to keep the Americans with us, Europeans must spend more on defence, especially on the security of our own continent. I am not suggesting that the Indo-Pacific has any real priority. We cannot credibly ask the Americans to take our security more seriously than we do.

I think it is time for the UK to respond to the changing global balance of power by giving the Royal Navy a greater role in, and a greater reach of, our defence diplomacy—more ships, in the words of the noble Lord, Lord West, particularly frigates. It is also time that we had a China strategy that joins up our political, economic and military objectives. It is something that we do not have and badly need. I do not believe in keeping countries guessing; that is dangerous. We did not keep the Russians guessing about our terms during the Cold War and we should not do so with the Chinese. We need to say what we mean to them.

My final brief point is to ask the Government, please—this is not my first time of asking—to take the opportunity of their proposed cybersecurity and resilience Bill, which I greatly welcome, to revise the outdated provisions of the Computer Misuse Act. They have the effect of discouraging cyber professionals, for fear of penalisation within its terms, from carrying out defensive research. That renders us all less secure in cyberspace than we could otherwise be. That does not make sense and is not a complicated change to make.

I conclude by expressing the hope that the Government will conduct foreign and defence policy in ways that enable them to maintain cross-party support. I have confidence in this. The beginning is good; may it continue.

2.56 pm

The Lord Bishop of Worcester (Valedictory Speech):

My Lords, I join others in welcoming the Ministers to the Front Bench and begin this valedictory speech by saying what a privilege it has been to serve in your Lordships' House for the last 12 years. I thank all noble Lords and staff on the estate for all they do and their hard work.

After my maiden speech, a fellow Peer asked me how it had gone. "Oh, they were very nice and kind", I responded. "Yes", he retorted; "I have never known a place where courtesy is used as such an effective weapon". I have experienced much unweaponised courtesy and civility here. I have consistently encountered humanity at its best, and I thank your Lordships, whatever their political affiliation, for their impressive devotion to the common good.

In this final intervention, I will concentrate my brief remarks on development issues, which have been a passion of mine throughout my adult life. While I recognise the imperative for defence spending and the need to be ready for war, I hope that the Government will pay equal attention to development, which is an indispensable contributor to peace and human flourishing.

I welcome the Government's stated commitment to international development. I note that the manifesto spoke of a new mission statement for international development

"to create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet".

I applaud this and know that all on these Benches will want to work with the new Government in delivering that mission.

The manifesto also stated:

"Government is at its best when working in partnership with business, trade unions, civil society, faith groups, and communities".

I observe, partly as a result of my first-hand experience in Africa, the Indian subcontinent and South America, that there is scope for much better partnerships with Church and Church-related networks internationally, especially in the field of humanitarian relief and poverty alleviation. Developing the potential of such partnerships, as the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury reminded us earlier, is dependent on the Government achieving a religiously literate international development policy and awareness of the role that transnational religious actors play in international affairs.

This is especially true when it comes to the Government's plans to publish a new strategy for Africa. An Africa strategy that does not recognise the importance of faith and religion would be short-sighted in the extreme. I am delighted by the appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Collins, to his new post as Minister for Africa, which I imagine he will take very seriously indeed.

The international situation with respect to debt is dire. As Christian Aid highlighted recently in its report, *Between Life and Debt*, 32 African countries spend more in paying external debts than on healthcare, and 25 spend more on external debts than on education. It is clear that, without addressing today's debt crisis, lower-income countries will not deal with the impacts of the climate crisis or have any hope of meeting the sustainable development goals.

The UK Government are well placed to play a significant part in addressing this crisis, because the majority of external debts owed to private creditors by countries in debt distress are governed by English law. I therefore welcome the manifesto pledge on tackling unsustainable debt. To put this pledge into action, I suggest that the new Government could commit to UK legislation to incentivise private creditors to participate fully in multilateral debt relief initiatives. Coming at no cost to the taxpayer, this would be a practical and realistic step that could be taken quickly to unlock the impasse in global debt relief and release serious resources.

I would love to see the new Government return to spending 0.7% of GNI on development as soon as possible, but in the meantime I implore the Government to ensure that aid is spent in lower-income countries, not in the UK. At present, more than half of UK bilateral aid is spent in the UK, mostly on asylum seekers, which is surely not an appropriate use of the aid budget. I also implore the Government to ensure that aid is refocused squarely on tackling poverty and its causes. That would include investing in the prevention of humanitarian crises and putting resources in the hands of local organisations.

I note that the Foreign Secretary has spoken often of the need for the UK to become a leader in development by adopting a model that emphasises trading with other countries to build long-term win-win partnerships, rather than following an outdated model of patronage. I agree. Such actions are in our own interest, as well as

that of other countries. As a Christian, I believe that they are also a moral imperative. Jesus tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves, implying that it is in loving our neighbour, wherever they may be in our global village, that we properly love ourselves. That insight has always been at the heart of all that is best in British values. I pray that it may remain so. As I sit down, I offer the assurance of my prayers for your Lordships' House.

3.03 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): My Lords, it might be judged somewhat risky for a general to follow the valedictory speech of a Bishop. Be reassured: right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Worcester is the cousin of the late Field Marshal Lord Peter Inge, who was a Green Howard, as is my noble friend Lord Dannatt and—you guessed it—as am I. It is truly remarkable that a single county regiment can claim three Members of this House and, incidentally, three Constables of the Tower at the Tower of London. We always knew that we had influence in very high places, and John has a special place in our hearts.

Bishop John has been a remarkable servant of this House and wider society. At Durham, he was a chemist as well as a thespian. He trained as a teacher at Keble, Oxford. Dangerously, he has a degree in systemic theology and is a doctor of philosophy. He was ordained at Chichester and became the chaplain at Harrow. He is one of the longest-serving diocesan bishops in the Church of England. He is affectionately known for his great sense of humour and his sartorial dress: a fascination with Edwardian frock coats, episcopal toppers and Panama hats—sometimes other people's. He has a passion for people, cycling and international affairs.

As he said, he has served the House for the last 12 years, speaking on international development, the childcare system, hospices, schools, assisted suicide, migration, asylum and much else. A few short words cannot begin to do justice to a remarkable man, but I know that the House will join me in thanking him for his service and wishing him well for the future.

Noble Lords: Hear, hear!

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): I turn to what I want to say in this debate. My time is now short, so I will concentrate on one aspect of the gracious Speech: the Government's welcome intention to conduct a defence review.

I will offer a view on what sort of a review this needs to be, because it needs to be very different from the last three. The SDSRs of 2010, 2015 and 2020 had a number of things in common. First, they had an elegant narrative regarding the state of the world, which was increasingly alarming in its portrayal of the growing diversity and intensity of danger, threat and instability in the world. Secondly, there was the reality of government austerity and the imperative to deliver national security to an ever more constrained budget; and, thirdly, to me they were all exercises in a delusionary reassurance to the nation.

Each of those SDSRs produced some form of alchemy that appeared to make an acceptable level of national security somehow affordable. In 2010, it was

defence reform. In 2015, it was defence efficiency. In 2020, it was technological advantage. Somewhere in the mix was fusion doctrine.

I offer that all three reviews produced the common and indulgent delusion that our Armed Forces were fit for purpose and the country was safe. I bore witness to many defences of this delusion even in this House. I fear that those defences came close to a failure of honesty both to Parliament and to society—a failure that, to our collective shame, we were all party to. We asked our questions, made our speeches, felt that we had done our bit and sat down.

The result is now extremely concerning. The Armed Forces of this country are most definitely not fit for purpose; they are completely hollowed out and, even more concerning, the men and women of those Armed Forces are now voting with their feet. Just as concerning, government has no truly effective narrative with society that alerts it to the dangers that exist and the risks that we are running. It seems as though so long as we somehow spend 2.5% of GDP on defence, all will be well, and the only really substantive question is when we reach that figure.

I say this in such stark terms to make the point that we cannot afford another SDSR that is a protracted and largely academic exercise that is wholly constrained by issues of cost, reflects a 20-year vision on the size and shape of the Armed Forces, and employs delusional rhetoric to conceal the realities of clear and present danger. Rather, we need a review that is clear about the dangers that we face, our ambition to meet them, the true state of our military capabilities, and the realistic resources required.

However, the review must do something even more important: it must accelerate the actions needed to win a war that we are already in. If we move, and NATO moves, with sufficient pace, we can still win this war without having to fight it. Ukraine does not have that luxury.

If I were to offer three priorities for action, they would be, first, to do whatever is necessary to keep Ukraine in the fight. We must not delude ourselves that Ukraine can win in military terms, but they can help to buy time for the second imperative: the re-establishment of conventional deterrence in Europe. NATO has a strategic deficit in deterrent credibility. We must be a leader and exemplar to make good this deficit. Thirdly, for pity's sake, we must invest in our people. It is our people, not shiny platforms, that are our strategic edge.

I could go on, but the sole point I wanted to make is one of principle. We are at a point in history when we need an SDSR that urgently balances ambition, capability and resources, and one that is focused primarily on the short-term imperative to defeat, hopefully by deterrence, those who seek to destroy the values we hold dear.

3.08 pm

Lord Soames of Fletching (Con): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in welcoming the new Front Bench team, and congratulate them on the smooth way in which they have moved swiftly into government. I offer every good wish to the noble Lord, Lord Robertson,

[LORD SOAMES OF FLETCHING]

as chair of this very important review. I echo the views of the noble and gallant Lords, Lord Houghton and Lord Stirrup, about what needs to be done.

It is a great honour to take part in this debate on His Majesty the King's gracious Speech. As we debate these issues here today, I do not believe that, as other noble Lords have mentioned, we can ignore the appalling terror attack and hostage-taking by Hamas on 7 October. Neither can we ignore the terrible consequences: more than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed, including around 15,000 children, and more than 10,000 are missing under the rubble. Revenge is not a strategy.

I am not here to question the undoubted legal right of Israel to defend itself. I am here to remind noble Lords about the importance of the international rule of law, to ask this Chamber if we still believe that it is worth defending and, if it believes it is, to be clear about some very difficult facts and our responsibility in the face of them. Even before the terrible events of 7 October, our proclaimed ally, Israel, had long been in defiance of the jurisdiction of international organisations and treaties, and been in breach of more than 30 UN regulations and the Geneva conventions. The catalogue of violations and rulings is dismal: whether it is the 1980 UN Security Council Resolution 478 condemning the annexation of Jerusalem, the ICJ 2004 advisory opinion on the illegality of the separation barrier, or the various UN Charter resolutions concerning the occupation, the illegal settlements and the forcible and unlawful annexation of land.

Beyond the customary verbal condemnation, the West turned a blind eye to these breaches. We made it clear by our apathy that Israel was an exception to the rules. We in the West are now dangerously exposed by that apathy. In September 2022, the UN independent commission concluded in its report to the UNGA that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory

“was unlawful under international law owing to its permanence and to actions undertaken by Israel to annex parts of the land *de facto* and *de jure*”.

The commission stated that the permanent occupation and annexation by Israel could not remain unaddressed, and the General Assembly requested that the ICJ provide an advisory opinion. That opinion finally arrived on Friday. It stated that the occupation of Palestinian territory is illegal under international law. This ruling was welcomed as historic, clear and unambiguous, but it only formalised what we already knew.

Make no mistake: Netanyahu's Government are accelerating their lawlessness. While eyes have been fixed on Gaza, almost 600 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank since 7 October. Settlers have reported that they carried out more than 1,000 attacks on Palestinians with apparent impunity, allegedly often with the protection of the Israeli security forces. Dangerous rhetoric is being ratcheted up by extremist elements within the Government. It is reported that Israel has recently approved or advanced plans for around 5,300 homes in dozens of illegal settlements across the West Bank. This is the kind of lawless behaviour we might expect from a rogue state, an enemy of the West, an enemy of the rules-based order;

but I remind noble Lords that this is a first-world state of immense sophistication and a proclaimed ally of the UK, the US and the West. If the West is to maintain any hold or credibility in upholding the rules-based order on which we all depend, the rule of law must apply to all equally.

3.13 pm

Lord Walney (CB): My Lords, I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests, in particular, my role advising Leonardo as part of the Purpose Coalition. I, too, am delighted at the appointment of my noble friends as Ministers in the new Labour Government, and at the superb choice of my noble friend Lord Robertson as the lead reviewer. If there was any doubt before, his appointment makes it clear that there is no danger that the new Government will listen to the occasional siren voice in the foreign and defence establishment questioning the nuclear deterrent, among other things.

I shall focus my remarks on the Government's target of spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton, made a powerful speech that was among those setting out why a spending target in numeric terms is not sufficient and must be accompanied by an expansive vision. Nevertheless, it is necessary. It is an important marker and signal to our adversaries of the seriousness with which this Government and country will take defending the nation.

The Prime Minister made it clear as recently as the NATO summit that the Labour Government's commitment to 2.5% is cast-iron. The manifesto makes it clear that the Government's No. 1 priority is to defend the nation, and that sentiment was echoed at the Dispatch Box by my noble friend the Minister in her opening remarks. The Government know that the diversity and intensity of the threats they face, the determination and expansiveness of our adversaries and the scale of sustained investment required mean that words to that effect must be backed by action. If defence is the top priority of the Government, they have to prioritise spending on the defence realm.

Let us look at a key example this week. In the other place, the new Government faced an early challenge from opposition parties and a number of their own Members of Parliament—to remove the two-child benefit cap. That desire is entirely understandable and right. The scale of child poverty in communities across the UK is deeply affecting, and removing the cap would be an effective mechanism, taking many thousands of children out of poverty.

However, in an environment where global threat levels are so high and diverse; where incoming Ministers and the Prime Minister apparently agree with the assessment of the head of the British Army that we must be ready to fight a war within three years, as the fallout from Russia's appalling aggression in Ukraine continues; where the Middle East is deeply unstable; where we are pressing on with the national endeavour to renew the nuclear deterrent and strengthen our cyber deterrence; where we have an equally unshakeable commitment to the AUKUS security alliance to deal with the rising Pacific threat; and where we recognise that all our goals for social progress at home are

underpinned by security and deterrence abroad, how could we justify removing the benefit cap—a worthy measure but not a manifesto commitment—ahead of the clear manifesto commitment to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP?

This is not a trivial tension. Figures provided to me by the Lords Library today estimate the cost of removing the cap to be £2.1 billion this year, £2.4 billion next year and £2.8 billion in 2027-28. Based on the current official economic forecast, if you added that to the last Government's projected increase in defence spending, you would reach 2.5% by 2028. Let us not forget that all this is happening in an environment where the western alliance may be set to face its greatest challenge for many decades, depending on events across the Atlantic. Britain cannot afford to leave increasing investment in our defences to another day.

3.19 pm

Baroness Altmann (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Walney. I congratulate and welcome the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, to their new positions and I welcome their collegiate approach.

I would like to make three points on foreign affairs and defence. First, I am delighted that the gracious Speech shows the new Government are seeking a rapprochement with the EU, trying to recover some of our previous opportunities to trade, work and travel freely with our nearest neighbours which were underappreciated and are not readily replaceable. I wish the Government well in their endeavours.

Secondly, on Ukraine, can the Minister assure the House that the Government will not waver in our backing for Ukrainians against Russia's expansionist intent, which threatens us all? Will the noble Lord commit to ensuring that Ukraine is not hampered in its efforts to prevail? If Ukraine is given only enough assistance not to lose, without enough to win, the callous and uncaring Russian regime, which is a threat to our democracy here in Europe, and other tyrants around the world will be emboldened against weak western nations, as my noble friend Lord Farmer rightly said.

Thirdly, this brings me to another callous, uncaring regime which has done huge harm to its own people and viciously attacked its neighbour. In this case, however, the world seems to blame the country trying to defend and protect its citizens, rather than the Palestinian terror leaders deliberately putting their people in harm's way. I am most disappointed at the decision to restore UNRWA funding. Hamas has embedded itself in UNRWA, using its buildings—schools, hospitals, even ambulances—to shelter terrorists and launch attacks on Israel. UNRWA schools, as confirmed by independent reports, incite the murdering of Jewish people and destroying Israel. It turns a blind eye to terror tunnel activity.

I and most others want to see a two-state solution, and I agree with all that the noble Baroness, Lady Ramsay, said. It is the only way for peace, but peace is not a solo. Is the Minister aware of any evidence that Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah actually accept Israel's right to exist as the world's only Jewish state?

There is abundant evidence to the contrary. In fact, can the Minister tell the House how much the Palestinian Authority and Hamas pay families of Palestinians who have killed or have tried to kill Jews? If he does not have the figure, could he write to me and place a copy in the Library? Month after month, ordinary Palestinian families are rewarded for murder. Do the Government condemn this practice, and what sanctions will they impose?

Palestinian leaders prioritise conflict against Israel over the well-being of their citizens. Hamas even targeted the Kerem Shalom goods crossing recently and it hijacks aid, trying to stop its people from benefiting from the efforts of the West to support them. As long as money given to the Palestinian people continues to be used to promote terror, violence and the destruction of Israel, how can we expect the peaceful coexistence Israel has always wanted?

Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and forcibly removed Israeli settlers from the settlements surrounding it. What did it receive in return? For giving Palestinians the chance for peace and a better life with their own leadership, it got a hotbed of terror next door. In fact, Israelis who tried to live peacefully next to Gaza were butchered, maimed and kidnapped by the very people they had trusted as peace partners. Will the Minister offer unequivocal condemnation of the continued detention of these hostages? Will the Minister support all efforts to secure their release? As my noble friend Lord Leigh and others have said, that release must be before a ceasefire and withdrawal.

The Palestinian people and their leaders have rejected peace offers time and again. Iran wants Jews gone altogether, and its satellites will continue to pursue that aim and then establish an Islamic caliphate, first in the Middle East and then potentially across our nations too. Will the Government condemn Hamas and call out its direct responsibility for the plight of the Palestinian people?

I hope for peace both in the Middle East and in Europe, as Israel and Ukraine fight for all our freedoms.

3.24 pm

Lord Stevens of Birmingham (CB): I declare my interest as chair of the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Like many other noble Lords, I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, to their new positions—I know they will be absolutely superb Ministers. I join in the welcome for the launch of the strategic defence review by the noble Lord, Lord Robertson. But, as the saying goes, life is what happens while you are making plans, so I will use this opportunity to raise three sets of decisions relating to the defence sector that will confront the Government in the meantime.

The first, obviously, is the people in defence. We learn that, next week, the Government will in all likelihood respond to the pay review bodies for nurses and teachers. Given the pressures on retention in the Armed Forces, it would be highly welcome if the Minister can assure us that, at the same time, the Government will bring a positive response forward for the Armed Forces review body, meeting those recommendations in full and supplementing the MoD's revenue budget

[LORD STEVENS OF BIRMINGHAM]

for the extra costs, which were quite clearly not budgeted at the start of this financial year. We look forward to his explicit responses on those points later.

Secondly, without prejudice to the SDR, a number of no-regrets moves are already in train across the defence sector, including rebuilding artillery stockpiles, commissioning further heavy artillery, doing further work on the huge capability gap around UK anti-missile air defence and, as the noble Lord, Lord West, said, continuing with the welcome shipbuilding order book, including the six amphibious support vessels for the Royal Marines. Another move is dealing with the physical infrastructure, which has decayed such that, for example, a nuclear-powered submarine, HMS "Audacious", has waited for over a year at Devonport for a dry dock to become available. All of these do not require a strategic defence review; they just require continued progress, and I am sure the signals that the Minister can send on that front will be welcomed.

However, there are some bigger capital investment choices before defence. One of the great joys on these occasions is hearing noble and gallant former service chiefs engaging in a little camouflaged blue-on-blue friendly fire as they try to strike out their rivals' programmes. I have a degree of sympathy for the point that the noble Lord, Lord Lancaster, made about how the Army has to some extent been used as a balancing item on these occasions in the past, precisely because it is less capital intensive than other branches of the Armed Forces. The NAO's review of the MoD equipment budget pointed out the consequences of that. Nevertheless, I do not think that is a good reason in itself for trying to whack GCAP in order to secure what would otherwise be a pre-emption of the defence budget.

I also do not think it is a good reason to use this as an occasion to make an ex cathedra pivot away from the tilt to the Indo-Pacific, which has been mischaracterised as, in some sense, a folie de grandeur in the suggestion that the Royal Navy can counterbalance or make a major contribution over and above what the US Pacific fleet will do given the rise of the Chinese. My understanding is that that is not what the Indo-Pacific tilt is about: it is a recognition that, as far as Euro-Atlantic threats are concerned, there is increasing connectivity with what China and the North Koreans are doing. It is also a recognition that we need freedom of navigation in order to sustain our maritime trade, and it is a recognition that there are strong industrial partnership opportunities with not just Japan but the Philippines and other countries as well. For all those reasons, I hope we will not come to premature conclusions about the so-called Indo-Pacific tilt.

The reason that all these trade-offs are so acute is, as a number of noble Lords have said, precisely because we have come up with this arbitrary and indefensible proposition that magic happens if we get to 2.5% of GDP by 2030. A 0.2% increase in GDP is about £5 billion. As my noble friend Lord Walney pointed out, in the great scale of public expenditure, that is a trivial sum. The idea that that is the difference between success and failure in defending this nation is for the birds. To put it in context, we spend more than that in this country on speciality coffee and crisps. If we as a nation can afford our lattes, we can afford our defence.

3.29 pm

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Stevens, particularly for the very apt and interesting comparison that he concluded with. I declare my role as chair of the National Preparedness Commission.

The tone of today's debate has been very clear. I think your Lordships all acknowledge that the world is closer to widespread war than at any time in the last 60 years, with the conflict in the Middle East, in Israel and Gaza, now threatening to involve Lebanon and Yemen. We have already seen Iran and Israel trading missiles, and they are both nuclear-capable powers. There is also Russia's bloody and cynical invasion of Ukraine.

Let us be clear: the established world order and the post-war certainties are rapidly changing. The United States is becoming more isolationist as it surrenders its global economic supremacy, with a threat to its commitment to NATO after the elections in November, while the "deadly quartet", as somebody called them, are becoming closer all the time.

China is investing huge sums in the critical infrastructure of Africa, Asia and Europe, buying up controlling interests in critical minerals and at the same time becoming increasingly bellicose towards Taiwan, on which we rely for semiconductors. Russia's attacks are both kinetic, as in Ukraine, and hybrid—ask the Baltic states or Scandinavia. Remember the disruptions to pipelines or internet cables and the cyberattacks by state-tolerated groups—we have suffered some of those in the UK—to say nothing of the bot factories spreading and magnifying misinformation and disinformation. Those attacks are grey zone; they are deniable, but they are real. If they reduce the faith of our population in our elected Government and their competence, or if they undermine confidence in democracy itself, that is job done by the people who perpetrate them.

So, of course, we must be prepared to defend ourselves against the threat of war. For that, we need conventional forces and an enhanced defence budget, but we must also prepare for non-conventional disruptions inspired and caused by our enemies. A resilient nation that has preparedness built into its fabric is a nation that can recover from attacks of whatever nature. That very resilience and preparedness act as a deterrent against those who mean us harm.

The gracious Speech was based on the principle of security for all, on the basis of stability. That must mean that our other objectives should be safeguarded against being disrupted or blown off course by external challenges, whether malicious and state led or from any other cause. It means that our defence agenda must also embrace not only military threats but all the other 89 acute risks outlined in the national risk register.

Last week's report from the inquiry of the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Hallett, into the handling of the Covid pandemic showed how ill prepared we were for a risk that had been at the top of that register since its first publication in 2008. It is a national imperative that we are better prepared to respond to our increasingly volatile and unpredictable world.

That includes the extreme weather events that we are increasingly experiencing as a result of climate change. Climate change will trigger mass displacement of peoples around the world—1 billion people by 2050—with disruption of supply chains, food supplies and everything else, and the political instability that will go with it and spill over national borders and into this country. At the same time, our critical infrastructure is ageing. Much of it is from the 19th century, inadequately maintained for decades and designed for climate parameters very different from those we now experience.

The first duty of any Government is to protect their citizens. The compelling reason for investing in resilience and preparedness is to safeguard the world our children and grandchildren will inherit. That must be at the heart of our future strategy. Defence, resilience and preparedness must go hand in hand. They must be at the core of the Government's defence and security review. Preparedness and resilience must be a central role of all government, every department and every agency—whole of society, whole of government. Our future depends on it.

3.34 pm

Lord Moore of Etchingham (Non-Aff): My Lords, in the gracious Speech, it is stated that His Majesty's Government

“will continue to give its full support to Ukraine and its people and it will endeavour to play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership”.

That most welcome commitment was emphasised by the decision of the new Defence Secretary, John Healey, to which the Minister referred, to travel to Odessa immediately on taking office. There he promised a new package of support for Ukraine. It was the right time and the right place.

I was in Odessa the previous month. There I visited the bomb-damaged cathedral and the museum of fine arts. Part of the museum had suffered a direct hit, and the movable works of art had all been taken to a place of safety. Putin's war is, among other things, an attempt to destroy Ukrainian culture. Blasphemously, he invokes Christianity as part of his justification for doing so. As the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, said, it is deprived.

I want to bring out a key word in the passage of the gracious Speech that I just quoted—“continue”. This country's policy towards Ukraine has been bipartisan since the welcome departure of Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour leadership. This continuity gives it great strength, as the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, mentioned, and our new Government should be congratulated on this. But there is a slightly unacknowledged problem: the United States, which after all leads the alliance, enjoys no such bipartisanship over Ukraine. Indeed, the subject is in play in the coming presidential election, as emphasised by Donald Trump's recent choice of JD Vance as his running mate. As a senator, Mr Vance has been vehement against US backing for Ukraine.

Those close to Mr Trump insist that he does not want to be the president who, as they put it, “loses Ukraine”, and it was good to hear that Mr Trump and President Zelensky had a cordial telephone conversation last Friday night. Nevertheless, the continuing uncertainty

surrounding his attitude and that of his fellow Republicans is literally lethal. It causes paralysing doubt about what Ukraine can do next. This doubt may well persist for six more months, or indeed further. In the meantime, lesser allies wilt and Ukrainian casualties mount.

Compared with the Republicans' attitude, that of the Democratic Party seems closer to our own. Unfortunately, it is not quite as simple as that. I draw your Lordships' attention to a revealing recent confusion. Meeting President Zelensky at the Washington summit, our new Prime Minister gave him the impression that Ukraine was free to use Storm Shadow missiles to attack Russia well within its borders. President Zelensky tweeted his delight at this game-changing offer—but then things shifted. No, said a Whitehall briefing, there had been no change in the way the missiles can or cannot be used. The fact that the Storm Shadows are Anglo-French was invoked as a reason why this could not be a unilateral decision—but I believe that the chief anxiety here is the anxiety of the White House.

President Biden's support for Ukraine has always been genuine but never complete. The White House feels itself constrained by Putin's threat to use tactical nuclear weapons if NATO missiles attack Russian territory. This is a particular preoccupation of President Biden's national security adviser. It is reported that he got in touch with 10 Downing Street to ask for the denial to which I referred.

Goodness knows, the threat described is something that would worry any statesman, but it should be noted that since 2022 Putin has issued many blood-curdling threats to NATO allies that he has not fulfilled. He knows that the promised US response to any nuclear attack by him would be punitively high.

I conclude by saying that, at least until the presidential election is decided, and probably for some time after, as the noble Lord, Lord Jay, pointed out, neither America's European allies nor Ukraine itself can rely on steady US leadership. This difficulty is probably made worse by the replacement of the Atlanticist President Biden by Vice-President Harris as the Democratic Party candidate. Into the gap thus created will creep all sorts of fine-sounding plans for a ceasefire, which, despite what the noble Lord, Lord McDonald of Salford, told us earlier, would almost certainly help Russia and damage Ukraine.

This will be a time when a heavier burden of leadership in helping Ukraine win—and I do mean win—will fall on the European part of NATO. It will fall particularly heavily on Britain as the strongest and staunchest NATO power in Europe. People of all parties must encourage our Government to rise, both in spending and in strategy, to the challenge to maintain the peace of Europe.

3.39 pm

Lord Risby (Con): My Lords, I welcome the sentiments laid out in the gracious Speech on the defence of the United Kingdom, in particular the recognition that geopolitics has grown increasingly unstable and that security will be one of the principles on which the legislative programme will be based. I applaud the decision to choose the noble Lord, Lord Robertson,

[LORD RISBY]

who is so respected, to lead the strategic defence review, aided, I am sure, by the new defence ministerial team in your Lordships' House.

As we move further into this more volatile era, so-called minilateralism will grow in importance to British defence and foreign policy. Minilaterals bring together small groups of nations collaborating to pursue specific goals or tackle specific issues. They have long been present in international affairs but today they are proliferating. Given the Government's emphasis on their commitment to NATO and full support for Ukraine, the minilateral to which I draw the attention of your Lordships is a specific trilateral initiative.

On 17 February 2022, a joint statement between the United Kingdom, Poland and Ukraine was published, announcing the intention to develop a trilateral memorandum of co-operation between the three countries to further strengthen strategic co-operation and engagement. Days later, Russia launched its horrific illegal invasion of Ukraine, so, perhaps inevitably, the trilateral initiative escaped notice. However, it remains a very promising framework.

The Council on Geostrategy, with which I and my noble friend Lady Neville-Jones are associated, has, in conjunction with the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", written a report on how Britain, Poland and Ukraine can together support the Ukrainian war effort and help shape a post-war Europe—primarily by strengthening national resilience and military interoperability, and consolidating defence industrial co-operation. Poland is to be applauded for its huge increase in defence expenditure and military reorganisation. I encourage those working on the strategic defence review to explore the potential of the trilateral initiative as an example of a way forward.

AUKUS is the second agreement that I draw attention to. In their desire to pursue a NATO-first approach, I am hopeful that the new Government will not reduce any of the efforts currently directed towards this truly ground-breaking security pact between the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. Critically, pillar 1 of AUKUS will see Australia acquire, with support from the UK and the USA, nuclear-powered conventionally armed submarines, which are vital to upholding deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, and will culminate in a joint UK-Australian submarine design which will support thousands of jobs in this country. I much look forward to my imminent visit to Barrow. A key element within pillar 1 will also see the rotational deployment of British and American submarines to Australia.

The importance we give to maintaining a presence, even though the Euro-Atlantic remains our priority, clearly signals our commitment to our partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific. Pillar 2 of AUKUS will see the three nations work together in developing a range of advanced military capabilities, in particular new and cutting-edge developments that will prove vital for our technological expertise. There are now 10 workstreams, covering areas such as hypersonics, artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities. This will see a deeper integration of defence-related science and

technology, industrial bases and supply chains, leading to the three partners spreading the risks and sharing in the success of innovation.

Much work has been done, to the great benefit of our future security, in putting together these projects. The new Government would be wise to continue these efforts and see the promising potential from these bold new partnerships exploited to the full.

3.45 pm

Baroness Deech (CB): My Lords, my own pressing concerns are the background to the recent European Political Community meeting and a recent statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. To my mind, they are connected by this query, which I now put to the Minister: do you know who your friends are? I am further galvanised by the wistful hope of noble Lord, Lord Newby, expressed in the debate on the humble Address on 17 July, that he would support a

"European Union (Please Can We Come Back?) Act".—[*Official Report*, 17/7/24; col. 20.]

It brought to mind the much-publicised plight of Generation Z—the adult men who prefer to stay at home with mum and dad, rather than go out and fend for themselves.

The EU is not an institution that we can rely on for the conduct of foreign affairs. Far from being a guarantor of liberalism and internationalism, it has become a spawning ground for political extremism. Wherever we look, ultranationalists or fascist sympathisers are on the march. In Croatia, there is the Homeland Movement; in Hungary, the most pro-Kremlin leader sides with Russia in relation to pressure on Ukraine; the new Government in Poland show little sign of being any better than their predecessor; in Austria, there is the Freedom Party; Italy is led by the Brothers of Italy; the Netherlands has the Party for Freedom; in France, the National Rally was defeated thanks only to an alliance of the centrists with the extreme left; and in Germany, the AfD is the main challenger to the ruling Social Democrats.

Germany is weak in every sense. Its long-standing reliance on manufacturing has left it open to competition from China, which has overtaken it in crucial areas. Its ill-considered policy of abandoning nuclear power in favour of dependence on Russian gas has endangered the energy security of Europe. Despite the grand statements at the Blenheim meeting, Germany appears to have failed in practical support to Ukraine. France's support is a fraction of that from Britain and America, and Franco-German relations are at a low ebb.

Not only that, but the EU is continuing to fund Iran's ability to attack its neighbours and to accelerate the completion of its nuclear weapons programme. We have taken our eyes off that threat—the failure to control Iran, the weakness of Biden in appeasing Iran, and our own and the EU's failure to proscribe the IRGC. In recent years, EU states have increased their imports from Iran. Iran's top trading partner in Europe is Germany, followed by Italy and the Netherlands. They should halt trade with Iran and sever diplomatic ties with it.

It is nice to think that ours is the most stable government in Europe right now—this is the real benefit of Brexit. The EU is an empire en marche. All declining empires face an extreme nationalist push-back from their constituent states, rebelling against the excessive dirigisme from the centre—in this case, Brussels. We are free to carve our own foreign policy, through NATO, AUKUS and other freely chosen alliances. This is our strength. The EU cannot be relied on; it is not necessarily a defence ally. It is right to urge countries to maintain their contributions to NATO and build up their own defence forces and industry.

However, in the Middle East we are not recognising our friend. The decision to resume the funding of UNRWA is to be deplored, not only because of its links to the October 7 massacre but because of its long history of teaching violence and hatred in its schools, as the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, pointed out, and its failure to settle any refugees. Our consul general in Jerusalem has never replied to queries to her about it. UNRWA is a channel for funds to Hamas. There are other agencies that can support Gaza. There are also worrying signs of this Government's failing in the Middle East: the failure to condemn the double-standard demonisation of Israel, the threat to arms supply, and the call for an immediate ceasefire and premature recognition of Palestine that would give an immediate victory to terrorism. Israel is our ally, not those states that would bring it down. I ask the Minister to reinforce that.

3.49 pm

Lord Naseby (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on his appointment, and the team that he will be working with. He is someone I listened to when we were on the Government Benches, and I will listen with even more interest now that he has some ability to change things.

I will start off with the foreign affairs aspects, of which I would like to raise three. First, many years ago I wrote a pamphlet, *Helping the Exporter*, and my goodness, our exporters today in relation to the EU do need help. I have one concrete example about which I will write in detail to the Minister. Basically, I am talking about international transportation of goods and the 90-day rule that there is at the moment, which, as it stands, will just about make all those international companies unable to undertake the work they do today.

Secondly, Chile. We very rarely debate South America in this Chamber, but I have taken an interest in Chile for some 15 years now. I believe that it is a country of great opportunity. Our trade with them has been at around 5% for the last 10 to 15 years. Now, there is a new Government. Let us treat Chile as an opportunity and look at the minerals that are available—copper, lithium—which are all part of net zero. Let us also look at products such as wine. I declare an interest as the chairman of the Cofradia del Vino Chileno. There are enormous opportunities there.

Lastly, Sri Lanka. Most colleagues in the House know that I have been deeply involved in Sri Lanka for the last 60 years. I started the all-party group in 1975 when I first arrived in the other place. They have been

through a huge number of difficulties: internal incursions, tsunamis and Covid, alongside everything else, virtually bankrupting them. But we should remember that they were a founder member of the Commonwealth. They came to our help in the Second World War and they were the only country from the non-aligned movement that supported us over the Falklands—quite brave decision-taking.

There is a report out now, it is on the president's table, about a truth and reconciliation commission. There are elections for the presidency in September. I hope His Majesty's Government will read that report carefully—I am afraid there are 600 pages of it—and recognise that this is the equivalent of South Africa and Colombia.

On defence, I have the privilege to be, I think, the only person in either House who was a national service jet pilot; I trained under NATO. I believe that national service is a fundamental need today, and I am prepared to put a lot of effort behind it to get it moving. We forget just how many countries kept on their national service. I am not going to list them here on a busy afternoon, but some of the key countries, perhaps slightly unexpectedly, are Greece, Turkey—I trained with the Turks under NATO—Austria, Switzerland and Denmark, which has a brilliant scheme. They are there. Now, we need to think very seriously about it in the face of the threats that we know so well.

Personally, I think that it should be for men and women. I have two granddaughters in the CCF at Bedford Girls' School: one is second-in-command and the other is in the naval section. They want to be considered alongside the boys. It is timely, because sadly, 12.4% of our 16 to 21 year-olds are unemployed. That in itself suggests that there is an opportunity.

His Majesty's Government need to remind themselves that it was a Labour Government under Attlee who passed the first National Service Act on 17 July 1947—77 years ago, almost to the day. On top of that, we have a defence review, for which I say thank you. We should have had a defence review rather earlier than we got it, but we have got one now and I am pleased that our dear colleague is able to run it. He was sitting there all day, but I see that the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is understandably elsewhere now. I say to the Minister that I shall take part and help in any way possible in reviving national service.

3.54 pm

Lord Teverson (LD): My Lords, first, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, for giving the list of European issues. To me, it was actually a list of why we should still be there and why we should not have opted out of our continental responsibilities, so I thank the Baroness for that commentary and for that list.

To a degree, this debate has been quite downbeat in many ways, quite understandably, given the current situation we are in internationally. Who can blame us? We have democracy on the retreat globally; a European war here, not so far away from us; the United States is moving towards an isolationist position, probably whatever the outcome of the election; and we have a China under President Xi that has become assertive—unnecessarily, because we all realise that China is

[LORD TEVERSON]

going to be, and is a great power, and that assertiveness is the wrong way to do it. His predecessors did it in a far more subtle way. However, I want to be upbeat, because if there is one thing I learned from my climate change brief, it is that it is no good being totally pessimistic all the time. The only way that we can move forward is to be optimistic and look at the upsides of issues.

On that basis, I first welcome very much, as other noble Members have, the fact that the Government's attitude towards Ukraine and their policy there will remain equally robust. To me, one of the obscenities of that war, apart from the clear breach of international rule of law by that illegal invasion, is the fact that Putin has put some half a million of his citizens through the meat grinder, in terms of casualties, and it is estimated that something like 150,000 of his own citizens are fatalities as a result of that war. To me, that is the ultimate obscenity. I welcome not only the continuity of policy there; I was going to congratulate the Government on the fact that the rules around use of weapons can extend over the border, but I understand that that is not necessarily the case now and I would very much welcome the Government's clarification on where we are on that.

In her very good speech, the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, talked about how Russia should "prevail". That is a strange word to use. I am sorry, I was doing my Biden thing there for a moment: she said that Ukraine should "prevail". Does that mean that Ukraine should actually win? I would be interested to know that. The King's Speech talked about "a clear path to NATO membership".

Clearly, I cannot see how Ukraine can become a member of NATO while the war continues in the way that it is at the minute, obviously because of Article 5, but what is the criteria by which Ukraine will become a member of NATO? I would be interested to hear that.

I also congratulate the Government, although it was rather pre-cooked, on their chairmanship of the European Political Community. Strangely enough, that was thanks to Liz Truss: perhaps the only good thing that she did was to agree to be a part of that community and that system. That is part of increasing our relationships with the European Union. I have a question on that. We want a stronger security relationship with Europe, and I think Europe will want to do that but will worry about the cherry-picking side. Will the Government be willing to re-enter some of the common security and defence missions? Chile has in fact contributed to some, as have Turkey, Canada and other non-EU nations, and I think ours would be an excellent entry into that.

The last thing I want to talk about has been mentioned occasionally: Sudan. It was not exactly a UK colony previously. Up to 1956, we shared it as a condominium with Egypt, but we have responsibilities there. I understand that we have been working with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and the Americans to find a way through on this. There are 8 million displaced people, and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives. We need to solve this conflict. Can the Government let us know how they

see that they can move that collaboration forward to heal one of the biggest blemishes on our global stage at the moment?

4 pm

Lord Stone of Blackheath (Non-Aff): My Lords, it is imperative that our new Government take a clear and active stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. This issue is profoundly important to many Britons, who expect us to adopt a proactive approach. Addressing this is a humanitarian obligation and aligns with our core values of conflict resolution and promoting peaceful co-existence. We must remember our historical responsibilities towards all the people in the area, as reflected in the Balfour Declaration as well as the UK-authored UN Resolution 242.

In dealing with this challenge in a world where the UN Security Council is paralysed, we must choose a practical and principled course of action. I am encouraged by the Government's commitment, as stated in the gracious Speech,

"to a two state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state".

The British Government should join the 145 UN member states that have recognised the State of Palestine. Navigating these complex difficulties will be a significant task for the British Government. Therefore, we should appoint a special envoy to co-ordinate our efforts and lead negotiations with foreign Governments.

The United States is currently facing a period of internal crisis. Amongst this turmoil, Britain has a unique opportunity to step forward and take a dynamic leadership role. Our envoy would serve as an international mediator and facilitator, offering a new path to peace, distinct from the approaches of the US and the Egypt-Qatar axis. The envoy's mission should be to emphasise the mutual benefits of negotiation for both Israel and Palestine. For Israel, peace would mean enhanced national security and would bring an end to the constant uncertainty that plagues Israeli lives. In Palestine, a partnership grounded in safety and security must replace the current instability.

I spent this weekend at a conference at the Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre near Oxford, with 30 senior spiritual leaders from a wide list of faiths: Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Buddhist. They all agreed that outer peace comes from inner peace. They suggest that instead of politicians and military people viciously arguing, we should assemble a group who emanate inner peace and love, and who listen carefully to the other side, and perhaps see whether we can heal this rift because we are all actually part of the same oneness. They suggest that resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict could be significantly enhanced through the active involvement of civil society. By bringing grass-roots organisations together for meaningful dialogue we can begin to rebuild empathy and trust, based on a shared desire for peace.

The United Kingdom has a unique opportunity to facilitate these conversations between grass-root social groups of differing perspectives. This initiative would include Israeli and Palestinian peace activists. It could also extend to activists from Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states that have signed the Abraham accords.

I would be happy to help host such a dialogue: my Hebrew name is Avram. Workshops with these groups would aim to create a shared vision, followed by discussions on key ideas to achieve that vision. Our goal would be to build trust and confidence among the different parties, developing a common understanding of shared insecurity issues. By fostering dialogue and understanding at the community level, we can lay the foundation for a lasting and just peace.

Incitement to hatred is also a problem. Israelis are deeply troubled by the demonisation of Jewish people and the State of Israel in Palestinian school textbooks. Conversely, Palestinians are equally concerned that Israeli textbooks fail to mark the internationally recognised green line border between Israel and the West Bank, implying that the entire area belongs to the State of Israel. Reviving an anti-incitement committee would allow us to address these issues head-on.

I am encouraged by the Government's commitment "to secure long term peace and security in the Middle East".

In this context, the United Kingdom must be ready to contribute forces if a peacekeeping mission for Gaza becomes the preferred course of action.

Finally, perhaps it would be wise to advocate for a new Madrid-like conference. It would not replace bilateral negotiations, which would continue concurrently, but would signify a new area where long-standing issues can be addressed. I propose that Britain encourages a Madrid-type conference hosted by the six Gulf Cooperation Council states—the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain—providing an opportunity for greater regional co-operation. It is particularly valuable, because Israel might be more easily persuaded to engage in a multilateral conference than bilateral discussions alone, given the potential rewards, including closer relationships with the GCC.

4.05 pm

Lord St John of Bletso (CB): My Lords, I join others in welcoming the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, as well as the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to their new ministerial roles.

This is an extraordinary year. Some 64 countries, representing almost half the population of the world, are going to the polls. This weekend, we will have the presidential elections in Venezuela. I was particularly pleased by the result of the recent election in South Africa, which led to a more pro-western coalition Government, at a time when its geopolitical importance has become paramount.

The gracious Speech drew reference to our Government's commitment to reconnect with allies and forge new partnerships to deliver security and prosperity both at home and abroad. In this regard, I wish to focus my remarks on three key areas, the first of which is the Commonwealth. The noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, mentioned it, and I know the noble Lord, Lord Swire, will talk far more eloquently than me about its role. The Commonwealth plays a pivotally important role in promoting our diplomatic reach through peacekeeping, development programmes, trade opportunities, security capabilities and collaborative

efforts on global issues. Can the Minister assure us that our Government will continue to give their full backing to support the objectives of the Commonwealth?

In the same vein, I welcome the work of our trade envoys. The noble Lord, Lord Risby, who has just spoken but is not here, has been a very competent and able trade envoy for Algeria and Lebanon. The trade envoys have played a vital role in promoting the United Kingdom's foreign affairs and trade interests. It is a shame that the noble Lord, Lord Popat, was unable to have his debate before the election on the important role and achievements of these trade envoys. In wrapping up, can the Minister assure the House that our Government will continue with this well worth while initiative?

As noble Lords will be aware, I have a long-standing interest in the socioeconomic and political stability of Africa. I am delighted that the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, with his vast experience and knowledge of the continent, has been appointed the Minister for Africa. However, I am alarmed by the influence of the Wagner Group, the Russian paramilitary organisation, which has posed a multifaceted threat in many countries in Africa, impacting local stability, human rights, economic development and environmental sustainability. Addressing these dangers requires a co-ordinated international effort and robust policy measures. There is clearly a grand strategy not just by Russia but by China to deny key resources from Africa to the West. To what extent are our Government aware and strategically planning to counter this threat?

Finally, I am particularly concerned by the increased threat posed by the Iranian revolutionary guard, which appears to be embarking on nuclear breakout. It is noticeable that the flows of uranium are increasingly being diverted from the West to the axis of autocracy. Niger is a notable example of this phenomenon, where there is evidence that yellowcake is being channelled to our adversaries. I mention this as I have a long-standing interest in the sourcing and supply of nuclear energy. As disclosed in the register of interests, I am chairman of one of the largest global uranium holding companies.

I am concerned that the West's assumption that the current second cold war will remain relatively cold is being challenged by the reality of the two major regional conflicts, which many noble Lords have spoken about today, and the big risk that these could escalate. I have always advocated the importance of soft diplomacy and deterrence in addressing the threats to global peace, and I welcome the appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, to lead the UK defence review. It is vital, however, that we change the tempo and the magnitude of our strategy to become much more proactive.

4.10 pm

Lord Swire (Con): My Lords, I join the general congratulations to the Labour team, the noble Lords, Lord Coaker and Lord Collins, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson; they will do an excellent job. I suspect, knowing the portfolio they have inherited, that the honeymoon period feels as if it is almost over, but they certainly are in a good position to face the challenging

[LORD SWIRE]

times which many have articulated so well this afternoon. I also add my congratulations to the appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen. The fact that he is a former Chancellor and Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George is good enough qualification for me, but he is just the right man to conduct the strategic defence review, as he enjoys the confidence and respect of all sides of this House.

It is a very great privilege to speak, albeit very quickly in the remaining minutes—I shall try to sum up my views on international affairs in about three and a half minutes, as others have already spoken about them—and it is a privilege to be able to contribute to the debate on the gracious Speech, in which I found much to applaud. I congratulate the Government on their sure-footed start in this particular area of government.

I listened very carefully, as you might expect, to the debates on the issue of Gaza and Israel, and particularly closely to my noble friend Lord Soames, who gave what I thought was a powerful and excellent speech. I congratulate the Government on resuming the funding of UNRWA. I never understood why my Government withdrew it, frankly, and I agree that we should do much more to stop the illegal settlements, which are illegal in their violation of international law. We must throw our weight behind a two-state solution. Over the past five to 10 years, I have had my doubts about a two-state solution, but I have now come back to the conclusion that it is the only viable way forward—a two-state solution guaranteeing the safety of the State of Israel. Equally, we must redouble all our efforts as part of that to bring home the hostages as quickly as we can.

A couple of days ago, I read in the Library a book called *Beyond Britannia* by the noble Lord, Lord McDonald, who was PUS at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and it includes some extremely interesting points. I will raise two of them very quickly. One is that he asks which countries actually need a foreign policy, which is a bit that is worth reading. Do we need our own unilateral foreign policy? Another bit, with which I slightly disagree, is that he thinks that the UK could diverge away from the US in the case of the US taking military action over Taiwan. He thinks that relationship could survive were we not to; I am not so sure.

I remember that it is very difficult planning a foreign policy because so much of it is reactive. Many of us in this House will remember when Robin Cook came in as the Foreign Secretary and talked about having an ethical dimension; it is a rather difficult thing because that ethical dimension ended up with us being dragged into the Iraq War. But a Foreign Office needs to be practical; for that to be able to happen, it is absolutely vital that all the apparatus of state—in other words, the Foreign Office and our security and intelligence services—are properly funded around the world, and I hope that this Government will commit to do that in a way that others have perhaps not done so well in the past.

The situation with NATO remains the same. We want to keep America in, keep Russia down and keep China out. The relationship with Donald Trump is going to be absolutely critical if he gets in. Even if he does not, the House is going to be a Republican House; we are going to be dealing with the Republican Party, so we should stop making unwise comments about President Trump, which some, now in high positions of power, have done rather unwisely in the past.

We have heard about AUKUS and I will talk briefly about it and the Commonwealth. The noble Lord, Lord St John of Bletso, was right, and I declare my interest as deputy chairman of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. There is a coalition or coincidence of interests in that the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in October will be in Samoa in the Pacific. What a wonderful opportunity this will be for our new Prime Minister to meet the other 55 Heads of State, on the global stage, to discuss matters that relate to the Pacific and the Indo-Pacific tilt. The leaders of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and others will be there. It is a fantastic opportunity for the UK to articulate its vision.

What a wonderful and underused vehicle the Commonwealth is. Home to 2.5 billion people, 60% of whom are under the age of 30, the Commonwealth had a GDP of \$13 trillion in 2021, set to increase to \$19 trillion in 2027. It contains half of the world's top 20 emerging global cities—New Delhi, Mumbai, Nairobi, Kuala Lumpur, Bangalore, Johannesburg, Kolkata, Cape Town, Chennai and Dhaka. It has a huge military force; India has the second largest army in the world, and, of course, Canada and Australia are key to our relations within AUKUS.

CHOGM in October is a huge opportunity. I hope not only that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary go but that they take the Defence Secretary with them as well to reinforce how important AUKUS and that part of the world are to us.

4.16 pm

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB): My Lords, I speak from a Sikh perspective, which emphasises that we are all equal members of one human family. Seeing others as lesser beings has been a source of conflict throughout history, leading to the horror of the slave trade, empire building and gross economic exploitation. It also led to the absurdity of superior and inferior races. Such talk was common in the 1930s not only in Germany but in this country. I was called a Jew in school by those who wished to hurt me.

In 1937, in a speech to the Palestine Royal Commission, Winston Churchill said:

“I do not admit ... that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race ... has come in and taken their place”.

Rivalry between “higher-grade” races resulted in the horror of the First World War. Millions died. The war ended with the defeat and humiliation of Germany. Prejudice led to Jews being blamed for both the defeat and the resulting suffering.

Prejudice and bigotry swept Hitler to power. The Second World War followed, with further atrocities against the Jews, the widespread killing of innocents in Europe and, in the Far East, the incineration of hundreds of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The suffering and devastation of war shocked world leaders into a new realism and a common desire to work for a more peaceful world. Victor nations agreed that the only way forward to lasting peace would be recognition of the equal rights of all members of our one human family—imperatives for peace and justice first put forward by Sikh gurus more than three centuries earlier.

Sadly, the desire of powerful countries to assert superiority over others has continued unabated. Today, we boast special relationships with some, and remain silent when they indulge in the horrific slaughter of others or the illegal acquisition of territory, as in the West Bank. In the name of defence, more powerful nations exploit smaller regional conflicts by selling arms to impoverished people in places such as the Middle East or by direct involvement in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan.

Religions, which are supposed to give us moral directions, are also responsible for horrendous conflict by often strutting a race-like superiority. Leaders of religions all too often ignore common ethical teachings in claiming a unique monopoly of truth and a favoured relationship with God.

Guru Nanak challenged this divisive view of religion. Our holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, contains writings of the Sikh gurus but also includes perspectives from Hindu and Muslim saints. Sikhs invited a Muslim to lay the foundation stone of the Sikh Golden Temple, which has doors on each of its four sides to signify a welcome to all from any geographic or spiritual direction. A Sikh leader, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, named by the BBC as one of the greatest leaders of all time, welcomed Muslims and Hindus into his Government and gave generously to mosques and Hindu temples while bringing peace and prosperity to Punjab.

A Christian hymn reminds us:

“New occasions teach new duties”.

Today, we are in a smaller, interdependent world, with common challenges. Our destinies are inextricably entwined. There is no us and them, only us. We in the UK have a common responsibility to change old-fashioned mindsets that believe force is the only way to conflict resolution. We must also challenge religions to drop their claims of God-given superiority and work together to give badly needed ethical direction to our one, admittedly dysfunctional, human family. If we fail, future generations will never forgive us.

4.21 pm

Baroness Shields (Con): My Lords, I offer my warmest congratulations to the new ministerial team and my support to this new Government at a time of unprecedented challenges in foreign affairs and defence. I rise today to address an issue of profound importance that strikes at the very heart of our democratic values and national sovereignty. Disinformation and divisive narratives, particularly those propagated through AI-enabled platforms, are undermining the sanctity of our democracy and the integrity of our global information ecosystem.

Our digital public square, comprised of leading social networks and communications platforms, has become a modern equivalent of town halls and community gatherings. These are spaces where ideas are shared, debates are held and public opinion is shaped. However, the very mechanisms that drive these platforms are now being exploited to manipulate free will, spread misinformation and sow division among our citizens.

Over the past decade, the entrenchment of a surveillance advertising business model has built these platforms into trillion-dollar companies, at the expense of quality journalism. Advertising, once the lifeblood of news sites, now flows primarily to these companies and their platforms, relegating fact-checked and researched journalism behind paywalls. This dynamic has transformed truth into a luxury good, accessible only to those who can afford it, while misinformation and disinformation spread freely. A recent Harvard study confirms this trend, highlighting a shift in how young people consume news, with 25% relying on YouTube, 25% on Instagram, and 23% on TikTok as their primary news source.

Jack Dorsey, the founder and former CEO of Twitter, spoke compellingly at the Oslo Freedom Forum last month about the dangers of unchecked social media algorithms manipulating our free will and undermining human agency:

“We are being programmed based on what we say we’re interested in, and we’re told through these discovery mechanisms what is interesting—and as we engage and interact with this content, the algorithm continues to build more and more of this bias”.

thereby deciding for us what we see. He warned that, soon, AI tools will know us better than we know ourselves and, either through design or by default, influence our thinking at a subconscious level. The risks are enormous.

Algorithmic manipulation is already dividing us. Provocative misinformation is exponentially amplified, while factually correct posts receive minimal exposure. Algorithms decide what we see and shape our perceptions of truth. They are designed to amplify extremes, provoke emotions and increase user engagement. Over time, these reinforcement mechanisms isolate and separate people into groups of “us versus them”, creating the conditions for political tensions to escalate into violence and civil unrest.

In the age of social media, we are conditioned to watch, like and share the very disinformation that undermines our democracy, making people vulnerable to manipulation and “influence operations” propagated by adversarial states. Recently, false narratives surfaced about the attempted assassination of former President Trump, suggesting the plot was either staged or orchestrated by government. These stories spread like wildfire, influencing millions and raising critical questions about the impact of algorithms and divisive rhetoric on public discourse.

We simply cannot accept a world where forces beyond our control or understanding are programming our thoughts and feelings. Privacy, free speech and the exercise of free will—fundamental values in a liberal democracy—must be protected by regulatory frameworks that ensure transparency and choice in algorithmic processes and preserve our individual autonomy.

[BARONESS SHIELDS]

The timing of our discussion today is critical. We find ourselves midway through a global election cycle that will see 50% of the world's population go to the polls in 73 national elections. Much of the media attention has been on the technological capabilities of AI to generate sophisticated disinformation in the form of audio and video deepfakes. Little attention, though, has been paid to algorithmic amplification and viral distribution of this content, which erodes social cohesion and poses immediate threats to the integrity of our information ecosystem.

For more than a decade, Governments have attempted to work with big tech on voluntary compliance to detect and remove harmful content, but the incentives to co-operate remain misaligned. While we have responded with legislation like the UK's Online Safety Act and the EU's AI Act, Governments are reacting urgently to harms and crimes without addressing the underlying causes—the very business models these companies are built on. It is time for us to take a step back and re-evaluate our approach.

The UK, through the efforts of the last Government, demonstrated leadership in addressing AI safety concerns, exemplified by the global AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park and the subsequent establishment of the AI Safety Institute. These initiatives align with warnings from experts about potential existential risks from advanced AI systems, especially in the areas of critical infrastructure and autonomous weapons. While discussions about future AI capabilities must continue, the most advanced AI systems in operation today—those that have driven our digital economy for over a decade—remain largely unregulated. The stakes could not be higher. We must act now to safeguard the future of democratic discourse and ensure that emerging technology serves humanity, not the other way around.

To achieve this, I ask the Government to elevate these issues to the forefront of our foreign policy agenda.

Baroness Twycross (Lab): I remind the noble Baroness of the remarks of my noble friend the Chief Whip. Could she start winding up?

Baroness Shields (Con): Okay—I am nearly finished.

The United Kingdom has the opportunity to lead by example, advocating for a global governance framework that upholds the integrity of our information ecosystem, protects our free will and human agency and preserves our democratic values.

4.28 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, in May I co-chaired a geopolitical conference for the Young Presidents' Organization. One of our speakers, given the global uncertainty and challenges that so many noble Lords have spoken about, said: "I'm not a pessimist; I'm only an optimist who's worried".

The gracious Speech spoke about a "strong defence" based on NATO's values, and our new Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Roly Walker, has just said that the UK has three years to prepare for war, and an urgent need to restore credible hard power to underwrite our deterrence. The noble and gallant Lord,

Lord Houghton, said that our Armed Forces are hollowed out, and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach, said that we need more reserves.

One of the biggest mistakes Putin made by invading Ukraine is that NATO is stronger than ever, with Finland and Sweden having joined. Five years ago, when we were celebrating the 70th anniversary of NATO, we had a debate in this House, and I think I was the only Peer who said that we should go not for 2.5% of GDP for defence but 3%. I think perhaps the noble Lord, Lord Sterling, said that as well. So I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker. Will they commit to 2.5% now and aim for 3% as soon as possible?

I am honorary group captain of 601 Squadron in the Royal Air Force. Will the Minister also confirm, as the noble Lord, Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton, asked, our commitment to the global combat air programme in partnership with Italy and Japan for the sixth-generation fighters that we need so urgently? It is wonderful news that we have the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, heading the defence review, helped by General Richard Barrons, whom I shared the platform with at the University of Birmingham, where I have just stepped down after 10 years of being chancellor. I also pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, who was an outstanding Foreign Office Minister for seven years. I dealt with him as a member of his India Council.

Talking about India, is it not wonderful that when David Lammy spoke at the India Global Forum just before the election, he said that if he became Foreign Secretary he would make India a priority and would be out in India immediately? And he has been in India this week, walking the talk. I think that is wonderful. We must try to conclude the free trade agreement. We started the negotiations on this free trade agreement in January 2022, when I was president of the CBI. We have had 14 months of negotiations, and here we are, two-and-a-half years later, and it is still not concluded. Can the Minister assure us that the FTA with India, which will be the biggest FTA that India, the fifth-largest economy in the world, has ever done, will be concluded? We do only £39 billion-worth of trade with India, which is the fifth-largest economy in the world, and it is only our 12th-largest trading partner. We should be doing much more. We do almost £100 billion-worth with China.

I am a proud member of the 1.8 million-strong Indian diaspora over here and say humbly and with pride that it is such a successful diaspora, a living bridge with India. Is it not a shame that we had a Prime Minister of Indian origin for almost two years and it has been eight years since there has been a large prime ministerial delegation to India? I suggest to the Minister that Keir Starmer, who is a great fan of our relationship, leads a prime ministerial delegation to India as soon as possible.

When it comes to the EU, I urge the Government to not just reset our relationship. Quite frankly, we need to rejoin the single market with free movement of goods, services and people as soon as possible, and, as the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, said, we need to rejoin Erasmus. Turing is nowhere near good enough; it is the Erasmus scheme that is both ways.

The Labour manifesto spoke about strengthening diplomacy and modernising international development. Now that we have a new Government, surely we should admit that merging the FCO and DfID was a huge mistake and completely the wrong thing to do. They are both excellent departments in their own right and should be departments in their own right and DfID should have 0.7% of GDP for aid. Will the Government commit to that?

I conclude with this. The UK is at the top table of the world—except the EU. We are in the P5 of the UN, the G7, the G20, NATO, AUKUS, Five Eyes and the Commonwealth—the noble Lord, Lord Swire, spoke about the potential there—yet we are not a member of Quad, which is India, America, Japan and Australia. We should join Quad and make it Quad-plus. We have the strongest combination of hard and soft power in the world. Our defence is too small, but our 24-hours a day, 365 days a year nuclear deterrent is very powerful. We are still a top-10 manufacturer in the world. I chair the manufacturing commission and am a proud manufacturer. In finance, we are top in the world. As for our soft power, wow—our universities are the best in the world, along with America. Our royal family is phenomenal, led by His Majesty the King. The BBC is watched and listened to by 500 million people around the world and our Premier League football teams have tremendous soft power. So I am confident that, with the combination of soft power and hard power we have, if the Government listen to this amazing debate—the House of Lords at its best—we will be able to deal with this uncertain and challenging world.

4.34 pm

Lord Oates (LD): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in welcoming the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to the Front Bench. I have no doubt that they will make as highly effective a contribution as they did from the Opposition Benches. I declare my interests as chief executive of United Against Malnutrition and Hunger and a trustee of the Royal African Society.

The noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, set out many of the foreign policy and development challenges that face the new Government. I shall highlight a few in particular. First, there is the vicious cycle of conflict and hunger that is bringing misery to millions in the DRC, Gaza, Sudan and many other countries. Malnutrition is a critical issue. It is responsible for the deaths of nearly 2 million children every year and it leaves those who survive with impaired cognitive and physical development, robbing individuals of opportunity and undermining the capacity of economies to develop and lift people out of poverty.

Secondly, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Worcester highlighted in his speech, unsustainable debt servicing is now a major issue that is destabilising key strategic partners such as Kenya, and many other countries besides. It is constraining their ability to meet their development goals and raise up their populations.

Thirdly, climate impacts are exacerbating many challenges faced by low-income and middle-income countries, further threatening food security and impacting health as malaria, dengue and neglected tropical diseases

become more widespread and resistant, as well as causing more extreme weather events, with hugely destructive consequences to developing economies.

The Foreign Secretary has characterised his approach to foreign and development policy as one of “progressive realism” and “partnership”. It remains to be seen how this will play out in reality, but I hope it will mark a decisive shift from recent years, which left our reputation around the world tarnished and diminished. In truth, our foreign policy over the past 30 years under Governments of all parties has suffered significant failures, and I hope the new Government will recognise and learn from the mistakes that we have made.

Fundamental to what went wrong has been a stubborn determination to cling to the comfort of our own self-image rather than considering objectively how we are seen in the world. Gaining that understanding requires a willingness to listen to and learn from others, to recognise that our perspective is not the only valid one in the world, and to understand that other countries may face challenges that make them considerably harder to govern than our own. Recognising others’ perspectives does not mean abandoning our values, but it does mean understanding that many who are now hostile to the West have become so not because of the values we espouse but because of our failure to consistently uphold them. Many people simply do not buy into our self-image as champions of human rights and democracy. More often, we are seen as hypocrites, ready to abandon our friends and values when we tire of an issue or our interests pull us in another direction.

Zimbabwe, a country close to my heart, is a case in point. Courageous Zimbabweans who have been waging a long struggle for freedom and the rule of law see us repeatedly trying to pick winners rather than standing for consistent values. Ahead of the Southern African Development Community summit that will be held in Harare in August, an all-out assault on democratic space is under way. The opposition leader Jameson Timba has been in detention with 78 of his supporters for 39 days, and just yesterday a Zimbabwe National Students Union meeting was violently broken up by police and 44 students were arrested, including the president of the student union.

Today we hear that Tambudzai Makororo, one of the women arrested with the opposition leader, is in a critical condition in jail. She was brutally beaten by police and lost her baby in prison. She had surgery on 8 July to deal with her injuries from police beating and has now developed sepsis as a result of the terrible prison conditions. It is absolutely essential that she is released without any delay for medical treatment. Sadly, the UK has remained silent through all this.

In conclusion, I hope the Government’s policy of progressive realism will recognise that one day, however long it takes, Zimbabweans will achieve their democratic aspirations and, when they do, they will remember who stood by them and who abandoned them—who just spoke about values and who actually lived up to them.

4.39 pm

Lord Verdirame (Non-Affl): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, on her opening remarks, which were clear and resolute,

[LORD VERDIRAME]

and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on his appointment as Defence Minister. In my two years in this place, I always thought him one of the most effective and persuasive speakers. So I trust that he will succeed in persuading all those who need persuading—foreign counterparts, but also colleagues in the Treasury. Warm congratulations also to the noble Baroness, Lady Chapman, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, on their ministerial appointments in the Foreign Office.

I do not come from a military or diplomatic background. But I am lucky to have been an international law professor, not in a law school but in a department of war studies. My colleagues in that department would not let me indulge in the belief that the preservation of international peace is an objective that law alone can achieve. When faced with an aggressor who has no regard for any law, our best chance to avoid war is to be strong.

Unfortunately—I echo the comments of other noble Lords and Baronesses, including every noble and gallant Lord who has spoken—we are not strengthening fast enough. In fact, we are doing considerably worse than the appeasement generation, which began to rearm within three to five years of Hitler's rise to power. It is now more than 10 years since Putin invaded Crimea, and we have barely begun.

Another reason for our greater vulnerability is a dangerous pattern in our foreign and defence policy over the last 25 years. Faced with a new security threat, our first reaction has often been to set ambitious objectives and to declare our commitment to them to be steadfast. But too often that commitment then waned; we did not stay the course, perhaps because some of those objectives were unachievable or misguided.

Whatever the reason, we left Afghanistan to the Taliban. We ousted Gaddafi and ended up with a failed state in Libya. We set red lines for Assad, which he crossed with impunity. We said we would support Israel's objective of destroying Hamas military infrastructure, and later added conditions that would in practice make it unattainable. A few months ago, President Biden told Iran "Don't"—and yet, as we know, Iran did. By acting in this way, we have diminished our strategic credibility. Potential aggressors may think that, in a confrontation with us, the West would not muster the resolve and patience necessary to win, and that their will would outlast ours.

At the same time, we have been enthusiastic about expanding our strategic commitments: NATO enlargement, AUKUS and now the irreversible pathway to NATO for Ukraine, mentioned in the gracious Speech, on which both Labour and Conservatives agree. I declare my interest as counsel for Ukraine in Strasbourg in proceedings brought against the Russian Federation for human rights violations perpetrated in the war. The problem is not our enthusiasm for these new strategic commitments; the problem is the Pollyannish assumption that they will not be tested.

The strategic defence review is led by a star team. I am sure that we will get a very candid assessment of both our past failures and our current and future threats. I also hope that the strategic review will consider a specific but very important issue: the effect of differential treaty obligations within NATO, and with our potential adversaries, on our ability to fight together and win.

Britain and European countries have been decoupling from America on a number of important treaties that affect the conduct of hostilities: the ICC statute, the Ottawa treaty on anti-personnel mines, the cluster munitions convention and the Arms Trade Treaty. The US is out; Russia is out; we and the Europeans are in. We know that Russia will not comply with its treaty obligations. NATO countries will and they must, so we have to accept that there will be some asymmetry. But we must ask ourselves, as Americans have done throughout, under any Administration, whether at this point we can afford to make that asymmetry worse by voluntarily accepting further obligations, however well intentioned. We must test those obligations on a worst-case scenario and take remedial action where we can.

In Finland, for example, there is a debate on whether to withdraw from the Ottawa treaty in order to secure its border. A state cannot withdraw from that treaty in the middle of an armed conflict. So, for example, Ukraine will be bound by that treaty for the duration of the war, even though Russia is not a party. These are difficult and uncomfortable questions, but they are necessary and urgent. If we are not prepared to contemplate the worst, we will not get ready for it. If we are not ready for it, it will surely come our way.

4.44 pm

Lord Sahota (Lab): My Lords, it is a real honour and a privilege to take part in this debate. I am pleased that our Labour Government will reset our relationship with European partners, which can only mean prosperity and security for our country and better border controls. As the American poet Robert Frost puts it, "Good fences make good neighbors".

As the Labour Party sets out to govern the country after 14 years, the challenges it faces internationally are daunting and many. In the last 14 years, the world has changed a great deal and become much more dangerous. To overcome and deal with this new "more volatile and insecure" world, as the manifesto puts it, our country needs a strong, robust and ethical foreign policy.

In recent years, dogmatic ideologies, extreme nationalism and religious fanaticism have destabilised the world. International border disputes have become a regular occurrence. There is geopolitical tension in almost every continent. Look at the Middle East: almost every country there is affected by war, and those that are not have human rights abuses off the scale. Even if a country is not directly involved in war, so-called proxy wars are going on everywhere. There are also long-running historical disputes in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Look at India and Pakistan: both are nuclear powers and they are locked in a dance of death.

The people of Sudan are starving due to internal conflict, and people of Africa are on the move due to the combination of corrupt Governments, conflict, poverty and environmental degradation. Poor people of the world are on the move, seeking better lives. Simultaneously, the Governments and populations of wealthy western countries are becoming increasingly selfish and insensitive to their plight. These immigrant refugees are often labelled "invaders", when all they seek

is sanctuary and sustenance. Many men, women and children are drowned in the sea while searching for this. We must find a safe route for asylum seekers, as we did for the Ukrainian families, and put people smugglers out of business.

What has happened to our humanity when we treat our fellow human beings with such disdain? The moral fabric of our global society is fraying, and it is incumbent upon us to mend it. We must not turn a blind eye to suffering and injustice. Instead, we should extend a hand of compassion and solidarity to those in need.

Our new Labour Government must adopt a new ethical stance to value all human life equally. We must invest in an international aid and development programme aimed at the root causes of migration and conflict: poverty, inequality and climate change. Our foreign policy should reflect our values of compassion, fairness and justice. We must lead by example, showing that it is possible to balance national security with humanitarian responsibility. Only then can we truly claim the esteemed title of Great Britain. Because of our history and the impact we have had on shaping the world, we have a special responsibility to lead in fostering a global community where every human being can live with dignity and hope.

4.49 pm

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, five minutes is too short a time to develop a proper argument, but I will abide by the Chief Whip's strictures and keep to it.

I say to the Government Front Bench—I am sure they know it—that if participation becomes a criterion for staying in the House of Lords, I fear they will hear more people like me wittering on pointlessly, because that is what will have to happen.

I want to make three points in my brief time. I visited Gaza in 2007 and we had lunch at UNRWA. Since then, we have had another 17 years of Hamas terrorist control of Gaza. It is impossible in Gaza to be an independent voice; you will not survive. Now that we have established that we are giving money again to UNRWA, can the Government tell us how they will ensure that the aid is delivered to the needy and the injured in Gaza and not stolen by Hamas fighters, like the aid that was sent in the past and which has built a tunnel system larger than the London Underground?

I was delighted to hear the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, reaffirm support for Israel. It is essential. Israel is certainly not perfect; we know that. The situation in Gaza is absolutely ghastly, but Hamas can end the conflict tomorrow by releasing the hostages and laying down its weapons, with the guilty personnel from 7 October going off to join their leadership in luxury hotels in the Gulf. We must also always be aware, as was mentioned in the Labour manifesto, of the malign influence of Iran.

My second point is about Ukraine. Again, support is not negotiable, as the Minister said in her introduction, but there is huge uncertainty around the US elections—the noble Lord, Lord Moore, spoke of that much better than I can. The war in Ukraine is existential for western values and prosperity. I say to the Government that we should allow—I know that the previous Government

did not—Storm Shadow to be used at any target in Russia and pay attention to Putin's threats. If Putin wins, his victory will be much more expensive for us than giving further Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine.

That brings me to my third point, on the defence review, which I welcome. I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, for whom I have great respect, as I do John Healey and the Ministers on the Front Bench. They are all respected. As noble Lords may know, I was always a critic of Conservative defence policy, so I see a ray of hope in the catastrophe that took place on 4 July in this defence review. We need new weaponry. We need to use new technology; we need drones and AI—the vital helpers to help us punch above our weight against superior numbers, as was mentioned by the Chief of the General Staff only this week.

However, numbers still matter, as Ukraine and Russia will testify, with the ghastly, dirty war going on in eastern Ukraine. Older weapon systems, such as tanks, also still matter. In 1991, I spoke to the then Defence Secretary and said, "The tank will be seen as the horse of the late 20th century", which I still stand by. Horses also have utility—okay, not that much perhaps—but tanks certainly do if you are standing on the ground with just a rifle.

The Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Roly Walker, said that we need to be ready to fight a major war in three years, and that is supported by the Chief of the Defence Staff. Of course, it all comes back to money. I say now that 2.5% of GDP is not nearly enough. During the Cold War, which was a war but was cold—we are now seeing a hot war in Ukraine—generally when we faced a threat we spent 5% or 6% of GDP. All our interests, values and prosperity are at risk. If the Labour Government really believe that defence of the realm is the first duty of government, which in essence is what they say in the manifesto, we need to prioritise spending on defence. More spending now will be less expensive than not spending money now, as we will discover, because we must deter our enemies.

I congratulate the new Ministers in the House of Lords, although I am not terribly pleased to see them there, and I wish the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, who has just come into his place, John Healey and the Ministers here well in their task of the defence review. Their task is vital. We must prioritise defence of the realm.

4.54 pm

Viscount Craigavon (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to be able to contribute today on the role that international development plays in the FCDO. In that department's various guises, that has been one of my main interests in my time in this House, mainly in the form of what one might now call demography, or population dynamics. I hope that might be regarded as important in its own way, allowing a disordered world to help itself to stabilise in a less drastic way than we have been hearing about today—a softer version of power.

Before, as I normally do, avoiding quoting any numbers in this field, I point to something that I am sure most noble Lords are aware of—that the current figure of world population is now just over 8 billion. When I first came to this House in 1974, the figure was almost exactly half that. As life has become more

[VISCOUNT CRAIGAVON]

complicated, such figures are not the signpost they once were. Many countries now have to address underpopulation, and the focus of our concerns is now rightly much more varied. There is no magic solution, let alone the issue of asking the right questions.

Running through all this is the continuing legacy of the successful United Nations Cairo conference on population and development 30 years ago in 1994, with its programme of action, which has since been the steering document for the United Nations Population Fund, the UNFPA. There are regular conferences based on that and updating that original programme, the most recent conference being in Oslo in April of this year. I give this as an example of the department's commendable support for multilateralism.

To address this debate more closely, and to focus on the role that one hopes the present Government will continue to play in this field, I would say that they have set out an ambitious programme. As encouraged by the concluding declaration of the Oslo conference, as well as ensuring that the target of 0.7% of GNP would be met and not just when we say we can afford it, also being asked for was, as is traditional in this field, that 10% of development budgets should be devoted to the programme of action. This includes the provision of the programmes on sexual and reproductive health and rights: access to family planning and reproductive health commodities. The important rights element has been added over the years.

This part of the Foreign Office has an excellent reputation to live up to, and we have the SDGs—the sustainable development goals—to guide us in sometimes challenging ways. So many of those are dependent on being population-based. As they do on so many other like issues, it is vital to our hard-won reputation that the department continues to support multilaterally the success of this 30 year-old programme, as endorsed by 179 countries, placing individuals at the heart of development. I hope that meets up with the good phrase that the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, used in her opening speech: “common sense and humanity”.

4.57 pm

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, on their appointments, and the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, on her impressive opening speech. I feel an affinity with the noble Baroness, because we both hold honorary commissions in the Reserve Forces.

I declare my interests as a consultant to Japan Bank for International Cooperation and an adviser to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. I am sorry that the recent and most successful state visit to the United Kingdom by their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of Japan, took place after the Dissolution of the last Parliament, because neither this House nor another place had an opportunity to debate the excellent state of relations between Japan and the United Kingdom. That would have been an appropriate way for your Lordships' House to mark the visit and note how the already excellent bilateral relationship has in recent years expanded to cover an even wider range of interaction between the two island countries, which have many similar

attributes as well as some lingering but interesting cultural differences, as those who have watched “Lost in Translation” will appreciate.

The only reference to trade in the gracious Speech was the commitment to improve our trade and investment relationship with the EU. Will the Minister confirm that the Government remain committed to the UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific and that any changes they may seek to the TCA will not have an impact on our membership of the CPTPP, for which Japan and Australia were the prime supporters among the 11 other members? Our accession to the CPTPP showed that our commitment to and involvement in east Asia is real. It was greatly welcomed by Japan, not least for geostrategic reasons.

It is welcome that the Defence Secretary, on his recent visit to Sheffield Forgemasters with Richard Marles, the Australian Defence Minister, confirmed the Government's staunch commitment to the AUKUS partnership and the jobs and growth that it can deliver for Britain. The previous Defence Secretary announced on 8 April with his American and Australian counterparts:

“Recognising Japan's strengths and its close bilateral defense partnerships with all three countries we are considering cooperation with Japan on AUKUS Pillar II advanced capability projects”.

Do the Government remain committed to full co-operation in this important programme? I would like to know their view on this, although I expect the noble Lord will say that this is also subject to the SDR.

The Foreign Secretary has made it clear that he seeks a new bilateral defence and security treaty with the EU. I was privileged to be a member of the European Affairs Committee, which recently published two reports relevant to this subject, the first in April 2023 on the future EU-UK relationship, under the chairmanship of the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, and the second at the end of January this year on the effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the EU-UK relationship, under the chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts. The first noted that most of our witnesses considered that UK-EU co-operation in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine had been positive—I think the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, said “excellent”. Our second report recommended that we should continue to consider seeking third-country participation in PESCO projects on a case-by-case basis, where it is in the UK's interests. It also concluded that NATO remains the leading organisation for defending Europe and setting standards to facilitate military interoperability between European allies.

The decision to commission a strategic defence review, pending the completion of which there can be no certainty about the future of any military project, has created a degree of uncertainty for Japan and other friendly countries in east Asia. As has been noted, we have entered into a trilateral treaty with Japan and Italy to develop a sixth-generation fighter jet—the GCAP. Although the Minister repeated his commitment to the project today, the Armed Forces Minister has declined to give such a firm commitment. I strongly welcome the appointment of the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, to lead the SDR. Does the Minister expect it to specify a clear timeline for meeting the 2.5% commitment—a share of our national product which I expect will soon prove to be rather too low?

5.03 pm

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, I warmly welcome our new Government Front Bench. We have just had a general election; normally, foreign affairs do not play a leading part in elections, with the exception this year of Gaza, which perhaps reflects the new diversity of our country.

Looking at the manifestos and the conduct of the Government, at the moment there is a relative continuity of policy towards what has happened over the past year—certainly towards Gaza and Ukraine, where there may be broad consensus between the parties. However, there are differences between them which will become manifest in the tone of policy, humanitarian and development policy and, above all, our relationship with Europe and what the new Foreign Secretary calls a progressive realism or pragmatism.

I see a post-Brexit Government who seek to connect and reconnect with their allies and avoid the nostalgia of “global Britain”. I noticed the headline in today's *Telegraph*: even the moderate Mr Tugendhat says he is ready to leave the European Convention on Human Rights. Well, membership of the convention is necessary to be a member of the Council of Europe. How can it add to global Britain to leave the Council of Europe, in which we played a leading part?

We welcome the new defence review and the inspired appointment of my noble friend Lord Robertson as its leader. There has been a general consensus among speakers in the Chamber on the importance of his appointment. The 2022 refresh was of course an improvement on its predecessors but still included a tilt to the Indo-Pacific, which perhaps now needs to be moderated, and underlay the development of the two carriers when recent evidence increasingly points to the turbulence in our own backyard of Europe.

During the review, policies in the United States may develop. If a Trump-Vance duo is elected and leads US policy, this will clearly have major repercussions on NATO and on defence policies in Europe, which would stimulate Europe to make greater provision for its own defence and affect mightily the defence relationship between the UK and the European Union.

Any incoming Prime Minister wishes to focus mainly on domestic policy, but our own Prime Minister was speedily diverted by both the 75th anniversary of NATO and by the EPC in Blenheim. How do the Government see the EPC developing? It may be like the WEU. I was in the Foreign Office in the early 1960s, when we used the WEU as a linkage between us and the European Union, as it has become. Will there be a more structured development for the EPC with, for example, a secretariat? Does it have growth potential? Europe is littered with bodies which have not properly adapted and should perhaps be abolished or at least modified. I am thinking of the OSCE, formed after the Helsinki Accords, and even of the Council of Europe, which should concentrate more on core human rights. Like the Western European Union, the EPC is certainly a forum for relations between us and our European partners.

Finally, there will be a major change, in my judgment, on Europe. I recall that the old Fabians saw an advance to socialism, brick by brick, in the same way we

advance to Europe, with youth exchanges, Erasmus, veterinary policies, energy policies and so on. These are the bricks which one day may approach the ultimate goal, and I speak as a very convinced European. We have many national assets which we shall draw upon, and now we have a new Government with a new spirit. Above all, we are in a turbulent world. One thing the new Government bring, which is of immense importance, is stability to our foreign and defence policies.

5.08 pm

Lord Skidelsky (CB): My Lords, I welcome the new Front Bench. I know the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, as an eloquent speaker and a doughty defender of the good fight—if he is allowed to.

I believe the Starmer era will be defined by its handling of foreign affairs. As many noble Lords have pointed out, the world is very dangerous place. There are three powder kegs: in the Far East, in the Middle East and in Ukraine. Each is capable of igniting a world war. I concentrate on Ukraine because it is on the outcome of this conflict that our Government can hope to have their biggest influence.

The gracious Speech says—the noble Lord, Lord Moore, also quoted this—that:

“My Government will continue to give its full support to Ukraine and its people and it will endeavour to play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership”.

The new Foreign Secretary spelt it out in even more detail, saying that

“the British government must leave the Kremlin with no doubt that it will support Kyiv for as long as it takes to achieve victory. Once Ukraine has prevailed, the United Kingdom should play a leading role in securing Ukraine's place in NATO”.

The two propositions in David Lammy's article are of course linked: victory as defined by Kyiv and NATO means the expulsion of the Russians from Crimea and the Donbass region. Without such a victory, there can be no clear path to NATO membership.

My first question to the Government is this: do they support President Zelensky's request to use western-supplied missiles against targets deep in Russia? Most noble Lords who have spoken on this believe that the Government should give the necessary permission but, to my mind, giving Ukraine permission to use our missiles for offensive operations deep in Russia comes perilously close to turning a proxy war into an actual war by NATO against the most heavily armed nuclear power in the world. Can we be assured that the Government will weigh properly the risk of such a deadly escalation before giving Ukraine any such permission, and bring those risks to the attention of their NATO allies, some of which are disturbingly trigger happy?

Those such as the noble Lords, Lord Hague and Lord Dannatt, who advocate arming Ukraine to carry the war to Russia, seem unconcerned with the danger of escalation. They never properly face up to the question of what the net gain to Ukraine would be of extending the war in this way. Perhaps the Minister will repair this omission.

I am concerned by the statement of General Sir Roland Walker, Chief of the General Staff, that Britain has three years to prepare for war against the “axis of upheaval”: Russia, China, North Korea and Iran.

[LORD SKIDELSKY]

It is surely not the job of serving officers of the Crown to define British foreign policy, so I urge the Government to tell the general not to be so free with his public words.

My final concern is with economic sanctions. The *Bell*, which is by far the most reliable source of information on Russia, has tirelessly pointed out that instead of weakening the Russian economy, sanctions against individual Russians have brought about the repatriation of Russian capital into Russia to boost Putin's war chest. Why do the Government believe that such sanctions will help bring about a Ukrainian victory?

I start from a different position: I do not believe that either side can defeat the other, short of a dangerous escalation. That is why I favour a negotiated peace as soon as possible. This means two things: recognising that Ukraine has already won its most important victory for independence, and recognising that postponement of negotiations will make Ukraine's position worse and not better. We may supply Ukraine with more and deadlier weapons, but Russia will continue to turn itself into a totally militarised economy, capable of even more deadly retaliation.

I finish up where I started: what is the Government's road map to peace in Ukraine? I hope the Minister will tell me where I have gone wrong in my argument. If the Government cannot fault it, I beg them to rethink their policy, because we are talking about the life and death of thousands and perhaps millions.

5.14 pm

The Earl of Dundee (Con): My Lords, in connection with this debate I join in congratulating the two Government Ministers on their appointments, the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, as I do on their different appointments: two very much-needed fellow Scots, the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, and the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.

I will connect three themes: within international communities the extent to which world peace and democracy can be assisted through improved education opportunities; the current means for achieving that purpose; and the ways in which the United Kingdom and our Government can now help to facilitate this delivery. In so doing, we are fortunate to operate against the much-respected background of the British Council's core actions and solid achievements over the last eight decades, sponsored from the outset by our Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

On the immediate problems we face abroad, I join many of your Lordships in approving of the defence and security commitments made in the King's Speech, including to NATO's principles of defending individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Council of Europe recently produced a resolution: The Transformative Power of Education. It identifies disadvantages affecting countless groups of people, ranging from girls and women, students with disability and special needs, learners living in remote areas, and refugees and asylum seekers, to those experiencing discrimination emanating from various pretexts and prejudices.

Considering the problems of education, not just in Europe but throughout the world, this is a robust and useful intervention by the 46-state affiliation of the Council of Europe. Here I declare an interest as recent chairman of its Committee for Education and Culture, and as current chairman of the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group for Community Development, which, in seeking better education opportunities internationally, has an informal partnership with the Council of Europe. I am particularly glad that the Minister winding up this debate is the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, who in Strasbourg was a parliamentary colleague of mine on its Migration Committee.

The Council of Europe's education resolution equally points to the huge scope, already proven and accepted, of digital technologies and how online education programmes can reach out through the world: adapting to differing circumstances and needs; complementing rather than replacing classroom teaching; covering all subjects within the humanities, sciences and technologies; and thereby not least enabling the acquisition of competitive skills easily available to us, in the United States and in the majority of European countries but often, for various reasons, denied to so many elsewhere. To encourage the consensus on education as an international delivery responsibility, I have a Private Member's Bill on the subject, and here at Westminster I recently put together and chaired a parliamentary conference on education as a human right and cornerstone for any democratic society.

During its G7 presidency in 2021, the United Kingdom gave an undertaking to promote education in the third world and elsewhere in countries where education systems do not fully operate. What actions have been taken since then? Which combined initiatives are in progress? Can the Minister affirm that G7 sequitur plans are being clearly designed and carried out so that they also contribute towards building up the strength of international communities themselves?

Does the Minister concur that online education programmes are best delivered through public/private joint ventures, these being cost effective, focused and of sustained quality? Will the Government encourage them?

Do they also have plans to make use of and broaden the recently revived Horizon scheme towards Erasmus—already advocated today by the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie—thereby further enabling working arrangements between schools and universities in different countries, such as that, which recently I helped to set up, of joint research into green energy carried out by the Scottish University of the Highlands and Islands in the United Kingdom together with Zadar University in Croatia?

NATO's worldwide security aims to protect human rights and democracy should be supported by initiatives to improve education opportunities. Following its recent G7 commitments, the United Kingdom—in its own interest and that of others—must continue to pursue this objective.

5.18 pm

Lord Hussain (LD): My Lords, His Majesty the King, in his gracious Speech, spoke about the situation in Gaza and the issue of Palestine. The spirit and the

tone of His Majesty's reference to this horrific situation is highly appreciated by millions of people around the world.

The world has been watching some of the most horrific scenes of human tragedy unfolding in Gaza for nearly 300 days, and the death toll exceeds 39,000, with more than 90,000 injured, a vast majority of them women and children. As a result of the Israeli invasion, according to UNICEF, one child is either killed or injured every 10 minutes in Gaza.

A few days ago, 22 people were killed by Israeli air strikes on a UN-run school. This is one of many such attacks on or near a school in recent days. Those who survive the bombings are at severe risk of disease and malnutrition, against the backdrop of a medical system that has been largely destroyed by Israeli military action.

While Israeli military action is still going on, adding more and more to the misery, devastation and death toll, there is further risk of a rapid increase in deaths due to a polio epidemic found in the area. The medical journal, the *Lancet*, estimates that the number might reach as many as 186,000. At this time when the people of Palestine are in dire need of help, I welcome the restoration of British funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which is providing most essential lifesaving food and medical aid in Gaza.

While all eyes are on the ongoing deaths, and the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza, I am also very concerned about the rising tide of settlers' violence and expansion in the West Bank. What steps are His Majesty's Government taking to stop this expansion turning into a Gaza-like situation?

This human catastrophe must end now. The British Government could help by stopping arms sales to Israel and working with our partners for an immediate ceasefire. Every effort needs to be made for humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza and the safe return of hostages. The time has come for the international community to pull together and act on a long-term, peaceful and viable solution for the people of Palestine and Israel—that is a two-state solution. To signify our commitment to a two-state solution, we need to recognise the Palestinian state on 1967 borders now, as Ireland, Spain and Norway have already done. Will the Minister give an indication of the timeframe for the British Government to recognise a free state of Palestine?

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants against Netanyahu, Gallant and Hamas leaders. In his response, can the Minister clarify the British Government's position on how they intend to help in upholding international law?

5.22 pm

Lord Loomba (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, for introducing today's important debate on the humble Address. I congratulate His Majesty's Government on their commitment to engage with the international community and to secure the UK's reputation as a reliable partner in creating a secure, peaceful and sustainable world. If we are to contribute towards peace and sustainability, we must work with partners to deliver the United Nations sustainable development goals, including those on global

poverty and gender equality. It is encouraging to note the Foreign Secretary's commitment to engaging with the global South in his first statement.

One of the most effective ways that we can make a difference is to align our world-leading expertise in research with our policy goals. I highlight the plight of widows, who are among the poorest of the poor, particularly in south Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and South America, with appalling consequences for the women affected and for their children. This is driving deprivation for multiple generations. When you think of the estimates of more than 300 million widows, 500 million children and millions of their dependants, the number comes close to a billion people who are affected globally. Given the continuing dependence on male breadwinners, this issue represents the most significant threat to gender equality for most women in developing countries.

The Loomba Foundation—here I declare my interest—has sought to address this through education and empowerment programmes and by launching International Widows Day to bring this issue to the attention of the international community. Recently, we commissioned researchers at the University of Cambridge to evaluate the progress of International Widows Day since 2005, when it was launched by the Loomba Foundation, and since 2010, when it was officially adopted by the UN General Assembly.

The report, which is due to be published immediately after the Summer Recess, concludes that, while International Widows Day has brought the topic into the open, the scale of injustice is still growing, fed by conflict, disease, natural disasters and climate change. The continuing absence of reliable country-by-country data is a barrier to making progress. The sustainable development goals, the report concludes, will remain out of reach until we can develop evidence-based policy to tackle this huge issue.

What is urgently needed is a systematic approach to researching the conditions of widowhood worldwide. The Loomba Foundation is working with partners to support the development of a co-ordinated research programme, including at the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations next March. My request to the Minister is for the Government to support British NGOs in our efforts to empower unfortunate and marginalised widows around the world who are suffering from poverty, illiteracy, disease, conflict and injustice.

5.27 pm

Lord Balfe (Con): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker. I do not think there will be any different response to my ideas from the new Front Bench than there was from the last Front Bench, but I keep trying because I believe I am right.

I shall talk mainly about NATO. I am pleased that my friend—I am not sure whether I am allowed to call him that—the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, is here. We have to remember that Article 5 of the NATO treaty, of which we often quote the first part, says that an attack on one is an attack on all. It then goes on to say nothing about what should be done. As a senior

[LORD BALFE]

member of a southern European navy pointed out to me, as far as his country was concerned, nothing should be done, under Article 5, if there were an attack in eastern Europe. But, of course, Ukraine is not in NATO, and the first thing I would advise is that

“Ukraine’s irreversible path to full NATO membership”.—[*Official Report, Commons, 22/7/24; col. 369.*]

to quote the Prime Minister, is exactly the wrong direction in which to proceed. The one thing we do not need is a lot of squabbling states carrying out their hatreds on NATO’s base. There is already far too much going on in eastern Europe with NATO members, but that can be contained. If we extend NATO membership to Ukraine, we will essentially extend it into a frozen conflict zone, because the next reality is that Russia is not going to leave Ukraine, either militarily or otherwise. The best you can hope for is a stalemate, and the only way out of a stalemate is a negotiation. You cannot bomb your way out of it.

I counsel the Government to look to a European initiative. Trump might be right: it may be about time that we looked after our own defence. In so doing, we would cease to be doing Washington’s demands all the time, because that is at the basis of this.

I note that we have said we will give £3 billion a year—pounds, not euros; I am too used to another Parliament—to Ukraine. I know politics is the language of priorities, and £3 billion is exactly the sum of money which is needed to end the two-child benefit lock, but the priorities of this Government are not children’s poverty; they are arming Ukraine and sending it lots of weapons that it can use to smash up other countries. This is not sensible, particularly if you are not going to win. The Russian Federation and its riparian states have got to learn to solve their problems and live together. You can rewrite your history and—my goodness—I have been there many times and seen how they have rewritten it to a ridiculous extent, but you cannot rewrite your geography. At the end of the day, these countries are next to each other and somehow they have to live together. If we cannot come to an agreement with the Russian Federation, we are in for a lot of trouble.

Talk of preparing for war in three years brings me on to my final point, which echoes the point made at the beginning of this debate by the noble Lord, Lord Howell. Capitalism has failed the young: many of them are unemployed, they cannot buy houses and now we are promising body bags. That is the reality of it. We will not be fighting this war; young people—our grandchildren—will be fighting this war, and they will be dying for an unwinnable cause. So I ask the new Government to think a bit more carefully than the last Government and somehow extricate us from this mess.

5.32 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, as this debate concludes, I am delighted to join others who have given very warm congratulations to the new Government Front Bench. The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, who will be winding this debate for the Government commands high respect in this Chamber, and I wish him and his colleagues the best for the role ahead of them. I also wish to add, as others have, my appreciation

for the noble Lords, Lord Ahmad and Lord Benyon, for how they carried out their roles in the previous Administration. They were always approachable, sincere and acted with propriety and integrity, and I am very grateful for their work.

My noble friend Lady Smith spoke extensively on defence issues, as well as my noble friend Lady Suttie, and others, including the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup. I am sure that the debates on defence will be significant going forward, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, will be a busy Minister in this House in particular. As my noble friend Lady Suttie indicated with regards to Ukraine, I know one of the challenges ahead for the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, will be how we ensure with our allies that our response to Russia is targeting its war economy—over one third of all Russian spending is on defence. That puts into context the discussions we have been having around 2.5% or 3%. The scale is enormous, and there will be cross-party consensus on supporting the Government for that. For much of the debate, I was looking across at the Government Privy Council Bench and I saw the noble Lords, Lord Robertson, Lord Reid and Lord West—Robertson, Reid and West would be a great name for a smart tailoring outfit—who are three significant parliamentarians who will be scrutinising and supporting the work of the Government.

As the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, indicated, this was a general election campaign in which foreign affairs received scant mention, but the Government have major and profound decisions to make on defence, security, development and diplomacy. These Benches will seek to work collaboratively with them, but we will also perhaps, on occasions, be constructive challengers and questioners. We hope that the Government will use their considerable mandate well.

As the election began, I was with Sudanese civilians in exile at their Taqaddum conference. They were calling for what we benefit from: peaceful, open, fair, democratic elections to decide who governs us and a transfer of power that is smooth and peaceful. This is denied the people of Sudan, who are enduring, as my noble friend Lord Teverson indicated, the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with 7.3 million people displaced, 2 million who have already fled across neighbouring borders and 25 million people—half the population of the country—now at crisis levels of hunger. The Minister opening the debate mentioned the name of the country but said nothing yet about how the Government will respond. I very much hope that we can have a humanitarian Statement, when we return in the autumn, about the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

On the wider Africa, we are looking forward to the Government’s positive announcement that we will have an Africa strategy—one that I hope is published and debated in the House. This is a continent of challenges but also of enormous opportunity for the United Kingdom.

In many ways, the dichotomy of the world’s pressing challenges and areas of opportunity is the political choice of our age, for many around the world. The choice, rather than being between left and right, is increasingly between liberal tolerance and extremism. This is the dividing line. We see the growth of reactionary forces,

as has been raised in many noble Lords' contributions, but these Benches might take a little pride that in Europe—in the UK, France and Germany—there is the highest number of liberal parliamentarians since the Second World War.

Our sister liberal parties governing Ukraine and Taiwan are literally on the front line in defending a liberal rules-based order. The Ukrainian Government and Parliament seek to preserve parliamentary proceedings against continuing aggression from Putin's regime. The Taiwanese Government are conducting their first ever real-time live-fire military exercises, as the belligerence of the Government of mainland China continues. Those countries are also seeking to develop and implement the force of law, not the law of force, in the eloquent words of my noble friend Lord Alderdice.

On the front line of this are individuals such as Vladimir Kara-Murza. I welcomed the Foreign Secretary's Statement but would be grateful if, in due course, the Government would update us on our activities on and what actions they will be taking. It is about not only individuals but organisations, such as the BBC World Service. I hope the Government consider reversing the decisions of their predecessor Administration on its funding.

Inevitably, much of this debate has been a response to the ongoing diplomatic and political situation in Israel and Gaza, including—as my noble friend Lord Hussain indicated in his powerful contribution—the humanitarian impact. Since this new Government were elected, 1,500 Palestinians have been killed and the Israeli Government continue unnecessarily to restrict life-sustaining aid into Gaza. On a daily basis, little more than 10% of the food and medicine that should be is being brought into Gaza and there is insufficient distribution, both as a result of internal Hamas criminality and as a result of restrictive Israeli practices. That means that the humanitarian catastrophe continues. During this period, Hamas has continued to breach international law egregiously in holding hostages.

The leader of our Israeli sister party, Yair Lapid, described Benjamin Netanyahu's congressional speech yesterday as “a disgrace”. He said that an agreement should have been accepted that would allow the hostages back home. So what are our Government doing not just to comment but to act with our friends in the Israeli Government? The intentions of new Administrations, by necessity, will need to be replaced by hard choices.

These Benches believe that actions should include expanding settler sanctions, reflecting the recent ICJ ruling, and recognising that the settler and outpost expansions are systematic and being done with impunity. We also believe that sanctioning Israeli Government Ministers who actively fund and facilitate this illegal activity, contravening UK sanctions, should be considered by the new Government. Proportionality should be considered when it comes to arms licences, and we believe that these should be suspended, as we did in 2014. The Government should state publicly that, if arrest warrants are issued by the ICC, the UK will act on them.

We also believe that the UK needs to be clear—and I would be grateful if the Minister was clear, in winding up—what the current position is on the *amicus curiae*

brief on the ICC, and whether the clock will run out tomorrow under the policy of the previous Government. Clarity on that would be welcome today. For the longer term, in due course we would like to know the Government's proposition for support of the enormous reconstruction effort, including, depressingly, thousands of tonnes of rubble that needs to be cleared.

Fundamentally, we also believe profoundly in a two-state solution, and we believe in immediate recognition, not at the end of a process but now. In fact, we have held that view on these Benches since 1980.

What is the Minister's view on the agreement reached this week between Hamas and Fatah, which recognises the right of Israel to exist in the 1967 borders? This is a significant event, but an agreement made in China. This speaks to the point by the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, with regard to what our strategic position on China will be. In opposition, the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, was eloquent in calling for a strategic review of our relationship. We will await this from the new Government, and we will work with them on what that review will look like. Already we see a situation where the Prime Minister makes a statement that we will be more robust with China, but the Chancellor is saying that we want more trade with China when we currently have the highest trade deficit with China of any country in the world.

On development, we have raised concerns over recent years about the whiplash-inducing policy-making and the changes to many of the policies, but the reduction in our reputation around the world, particularly in the global South—as the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, indicated, and which my noble friends Lord Oates and Lord Teverson spoke to—has had strategic consequences. If the Government's intention is that we will have a foreign policy that will be more reliable, dependable and predictable, we will support that; in fact, we will work with them to bring that about. At the heart of this must be the immediate restoration of our 0.7% legal commitment for ODA, including a 15% share of that on education, and a restoration of funding for women and girls and for water and sanitary health. We should return to the all-party consensus of meeting 0.7% and enshrine it in the legislation, not just a Labour-Conservative consensus of reaching it only when fiscal circumstances allow. Surely the United Kingdom, as one of the richest countries in the world, should not be a country whose response to some of the worst famines in Africa for 30 years is that we will restore our support for famine relief when our fiscal circumstances allow. This is a political choice, not a fiscal one.

I agree with the valedictory contribution of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Worcester. Never again should this country, as it did last year, spend more overseas aid in the UK on a failed immigration policy than abroad in combating and preventing migration in the first place.

To conclude, we need to restore our reputation, and I wish the Government well for it. There are a couple of practical things that we could do. The first, which was not mentioned in the Minister's opening speech, is to give full-hearted support for the delivery of the sustainable development goals. This Government will preside over the 10th anniversary of the SDGs; ensuring that they are as on track as possible will send the best

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]
 signal possible. We should also return to an independent development department and have clear structures when it comes to delivering development. Much of this debate has been about the means of conduct in warfare in the 21st century, but we all know that it is not solely on the battlefield. It is also in the digital cloud, in misinformation and disinformation, and, yes, in the integrity of those who say they believe in rules. As my noble friend Lord Oates said, we must adhere to them ourselves.

The world is in transition on climate and poverty and in conflict. If we are to be a partner of choice, which I hope the Government will seek to be, we will work with them and will wish them well on that endeavour.

5.44 pm

Lord Benyon (Con): My Lords, it is a privilege to have been taken off the subs' bench to conclude this debate for the Opposition. I will start where many others have, by welcoming the noble Baroness, Lady Anderson, and the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, to their places on the Government Bench. They have both proved themselves in this House and in the other place, and it is in all our interests that they succeed in government. We also welcome other Ministers to the Front Bench in the important area of the nation's defence and international affairs. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, and the noble Baroness, Lady Chapman, who are not here, join a fascinating and highly inspiring department. I thank the many officials I worked with in the FCDO and at Defra over the last three and a bit years. With the FCDO, of course it is not just those in King Charles Street; it is also those working in Scotland, in agencies and in diplomatic posts abroad, who do incredible work on this country's behalf, often, as I have witnessed, in very challenging circumstances.

I also thank the ministerial colleagues with whom I worked. It was a privilege to work with my noble friends Lord Ahmad and Lord Cameron, both of whom commanded respect across this House and across the world in equal measure. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the elegant valedictory speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Worcester, and wish him well.

The gracious Speech at the start of this new Parliament comes at a perilous time for world affairs. I was too young to appreciate the Cuban missile crisis, but what we face at this time is as bad as anything that that generation of leaders faced. That crisis was of course a binary one between East and West, and today we face multifaceted insecurities and tensions that so easily spill over into conflict. The post-war rules-based order is weakened and autocratic rulers are on the rise. On page 17 of the international development White Paper, which I will refer to later, there is a horrific graph showing the change for the worse in the share of the world's population living under autocratising regimes in 2022, compared with just a decade before. This is all happening at a time when narrow nationalism, which has so disfigured our past, is again rearing its ugly head across Europe.

It has been noted around the world that it would be very hard to get a cigarette paper between the views of the two main parties in this country on the biggest

security issue of our time, Putin's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine. We welcome the Government keeping in place our commitment to spend at least £3 billion a year on military support for Ukraine, and I know I speak for these Benches when I say that we will support the Government every step of the way as they support Ukraine in the vital coming weeks and months.

We need to make sure our allies are stepping up too. In one sense, Putin's actions have had the perverse effect of energising NATO and the West, and the allocation of more resources to our collective defence. But all countries have their own agendas and domestic calls on finance. In that respect, the recent NATO leaders summit was encouraging, but words need to be matched by real and effective support for the Ukrainian people.

In government we were also a leading advocate for sanctioned Russian assets being used to support Ukraine, and for ensuring that Russia pays for the destruction it has caused. I urge the Government to push the international community to agree the most ambitious solution possible on these assets. While talking about Russia, I entirely concur with the remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Purvis. I hope the new Government will continue to push for the release of Vladimir Kara-Murza, one of the bravest people I have met and a British citizen.

In relation to the Middle East, the priority is of course the need to end the Gaza conflict with a sustainable ceasefire as quickly as possible. From a position within the FCDO, I saw how the UK was and is an important—I should say vital—player in finding a lasting solution to this awful conflict. As a Minister, I would go from conversations with Ministers and officials that reflected the deep, complicated nature of the Gaza situation, and walk past protesters on the street for whom it was the simplest of matters. For them, there was only one side that was good and the other, which was bad.

The truths from which we cannot escape are that what happened on 7 October was barbaric, that Hamas is a vile terrorist organisation and that the continued holding of hostages is a terrible wrong. At the same time, it is also possible to hold the other essential truth in our mind: that the suffering of ordinary Gazans has been horrendous for them to endure and, yes, for us to witness, and that their suffering needs to be brought to a speedy end.

To my noble friend Lord Soames, who made a very powerful speech, and in answering the final remarks of my noble friend Lord Polak, I say that, if we look beyond the current Government of Israel and the brutal Hamas leadership, I can do no better than quote my right honourable friend the shadow Foreign Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, who said in the other place:

"We must not lose sight of the fact that this is, at its heart, a tale of two just causes, of two peoples' legitimate aspirations for national sovereignty, security and dignity".—[*Official Report*, Commons, 18/7/24; col. 222.]

The deal which the UK championed at the UN, which secured the consent of the international community, remains the way forward: a negotiated pause in the fighting, the release of the remaining hostages, the scaling up of humanitarian aid and help to bring about conditions that will allow for a permanent end

to hostilities. We wish the Foreign Secretary and his Ministers well in dealing with what at times seems like an intractable problem.

My noble friend Lady Goldie, eloquently using culinary analogies, set out our position on defence at the start of this debate. I understand the Government's desire to have a defence review, but I urge them not to reinvent the wheel. We take great comfort from the fact that the noble Lord, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, is leading that review. He has been showered with accolades today, to the point where he might start to be worried that he can only disappoint from here, but I know he will not. He is held in enormous respect on all sides of the House, and I hope he leaves this debate with the words of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, my noble friend Lord Lancaster and the noble Lord, Lord Stevens, who made powerful contributions, echoing in his head. I do not have time to speak on all the threats his review must cover, but I underline the words of the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, and ask that the word "Taiwan" be included. China's threats cannot be ignored, and the implications of military action in or around Taiwan are massive for the entire world.

I had what I felt was the best job in government as hybrid Minister in the FCDO and Defra. The nexus between, on the one hand, climate change and the degradation of nature and, on the other hand, global security is so relevant to this debate. I am sad that that role is not being replicated, but there are many more areas of government where those issues need to be joined up. In that context, I urge Ministers to read the excellent annual NATO *Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment*, published this month. In considering the defence and security of these islands, our allies and our interests around the world, we cannot ignore the impact a changing climate and the destruction of natural systems is having. Despite being outside the EU, our ability to work with it on security issues has never been more necessary. However, we watch with concern the desire by some to create an EU defence capability, which would be at NATO's expense and would add a bureaucratic tier to the defence capability that would not be to our or Europe's strategic advantage.

I shall conclude by talking about international development. I arrived in my post at the FCDO on the day last year when *International Development in a Contested World: Ending Extreme Poverty and Tackling Climate Change, a White Paper on International Development* was published. It sets out to do precisely that, and has been widely praised by NGOs, multilateral bodies and other Governments. We hope the Government will stay true to the "we will"s that pepper the document throughout and show real determination to deliver for the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

It was a pleasure to work with Andrew Mitchell, the author of the White Paper and the moving force behind this reboot of what international development assistance should be about. He managed to combine compassion with effectiveness. His successors in the department need to study his methods and understand how he could cut through the Government-speak and the NGO-speak, and the consequent inertia that too often flowed from them, to keep focused on what

development aid is supposed to do. He and my noble friend Lord Cameron, who was one of the architects of the SDGs, drove this policy area in the short time that they and we had together at the FCDO.

I want to tackle the issue of funding head-on. I was proud to be part of a Government, led by my noble friend Lord Cameron, who fulfilled our commitment to spend both at least 2% of GDP on defence and 0.7% of GDP on overseas aid. Of course I understand that, when a Government spend over £400 billion keeping people safe and in work during a pandemic, there are financial consequences. But, like many in this House, I was dismayed that international development assistance took such a significant hit. What Ministers had started to do, effectively, was to make each pound stretch further, to sweat the Government's and multilateral development banks' balance sheets, to help more of the world's vulnerable and to move back to that 0.7% figure.

We will support the Government if they counter, in the way that we did, the rollback of the rights of women or LGBT rights and the disgraceful scrapping of laws against female genital mutilation. We hope the Government's policy will show that we continue to stand up for the world's poorest and most vulnerable, not just because we are a compassionate and civilised nation but because we realise that it is in our own national self-interest.

My great regret is that we could not lay the legislation to ratify the biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction treaty, which is a Foreign Office duty, before we left office. I hope Foreign Office Ministers will understand that we gave clear instructions that a Bill should be prepared by September and that the Bill should be taken through both Houses and the treaty ratified by World Ocean Day next June.

I conclude by saying that I am grateful to my noble friends Lord Swire and Lord Howell for mentioning the Commonwealth. We look forward to CHOGM and to the Government helping to make a success of that important meeting. I also thank my noble friend Lady Shields and others for raising the issue of AI and its important impact on global affairs.

Ministers will know that there is a huge knowledge and understanding of international affairs and defence issues in this House. I know they will want to debate these policy areas and keep this House informed. It is the job of all of us in this House to support the Government when they are getting it right and to hold them to account when they are not. On behalf of all on this side, we wish them well. It is in our interests that they succeed.

5.57 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Coaker) (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, for winding up for the Liberal Democrats and the noble Lord, Lord Benyon, for winding up for His Majesty's Opposition.

Before we begin, I will say that we will all have been shocked to learn of the soldier who was attacked in uniform earlier this week in Kent. Our thoughts are with him and his family at this time. My department is

[LORD COAKER]

working closely with Kent Police to support their investigations, and I am sure we all send our best wishes to the soldier and his family.

Today's debate concludes six days of debate on His Majesty's gracious Speech. I have not read every word, but most of what I have read has been informed by the insight and wisdom of your Lordships' House.

I apologise if I do not respond to every single question today. Obviously, I will write where appropriate, as I have already said to one noble Baroness, but it might be appropriate if in September I hold a meeting where people can come and see where we have got to on particular points they have made that they feel may not have been taken forward as much as possible—and, indeed, where sometimes I may have to go to find further information out. If we do that, we have had a good debate but we have also seen how we can more effectively inform government policy, even perhaps sometimes where we obviously disagree. That is an offer that I make to noble Lords as we go forward.

I also thank my predecessors. The noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, is here and spoke with customary wisdom and insight. It has been a privilege working with her and I know we will continue working together in different ways. Will she pass on my best wishes to the noble Earl, Lord Minto, who cannot be with us today? In the work I am doing in the department, I am building on the foundations that they laid, in the very office that they were in. Certainly, I will build on that.

To answer one of the noble Baroness's questions on international development and the White Paper she referred to, it is our intention to take that forward and we are looking at how we might do that. On the clean power alliance, we will bring together a coalition of countries at the cutting edge of climate action. Again, we will ensure that we are doing everything we can to take that forward.

I also thank the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, for her customary courtesy and the remarks she made, in particular about SMEs and opportunity. I say to her that SMEs have every possibility of contributing to the SDR with my noble friend Lord Robertson. I hope that she could put that to her contacts.

I hope that noble Lords opposite can pass on my thanks to the noble Lords, Lord Cameron and Lord Ahmad, who was here earlier in the debate. He was a template for how to operate in your Lordships' House. I know he will contribute in other ways, but I think it would be appropriate if that was passed on. I will endeavour to replicate his openness and courtesy.

Today's debate shows that we have some differences, but we are all united in the defence of freedom, democracy, human rights and the international rules-based order. We will defend that, with our allies in Europe and across the globe. One thing that should come from this debate today is that, whatever questions we have about government policy with respect to particular regions or aspects of defence, the world and our allies should know, in Europe and beyond, that this country stands firm in the defence of those values and we will work with others to defend them, as we should.

Our country has demonstrated this just recently. Sometimes in our debates, we forget the fact that our democracy is shown as an example of how power changes hands through a vote, with one Government being replaced by another. For all we have discussed in this House today, we should be thankful for that democracy, often won through war and through the defence of those freedoms, as many noble Lords will know better than me. We should reflect on that today and be proud of the example we set across the world.

I say to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, that that should not be lost. One of the things we stand for is religious freedom across the world—the Archbishop reminded us of this in his remarks—not just for a Church of England or a Christian faith, but for faiths united across the world. That was a very important contribution that the most reverend Primate made to the debate, supported of course by his colleague, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester, who worked on earlier reports as Bishop of Truro and now as Bishop of Winchester. They both made really significant contributions, and it is important we remember all of that.

I will also just say to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Worcester, who made his valedictory speech, that the contributions he has made have been welcomed by all in your Lordships' House. I wish him well in whatever comes. In his contribution—and a number of other noble Lords mentioned this, including the noble Lord, Lord Purvis—he mentioned the importance of spending 0.7% on international development. He will know, as others will, that this Government have an objective of getting back to 0.7% as soon as we fiscally can. That is the aim of this Government.

The first duty of any Government is to keep the country safe. I pay tribute to the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, our veterans, and the families who support them. Theirs is the ultimate public service. As noble Lords have debated on many occasions, and as the Defence Secretary set out in the Commons last week, these are serious and challenging times. This Parliament meets at a moment when there is war in Europe, conflict in the Middle East, growing Russian aggression and increasing global threats. The conventional and hybrid threats we face from hostile states have continued to grow and morph. Our institutions, public services, businesses and universities, and our very democracy, have faced a growing barrage of cyberattacks and disinformation. The darkening global landscape requires us to be focused and determined as a Government, and it requires Britain to stay strong and connected.

We started by talking about the SDR. Last week, the Prime Minister launched a root and branch strategic defence review to make Britain secure at home and strong abroad. It will be overseen by the Defence Secretary and led, as we have heard, by the former NATO Secretary-General, the noble Lord, Lord Robertson, a Member of this House, supported by General Sir Richard Barrons and Dr Fiona Hill. It will be delivered at pace, reporting in the first half of 2025, with work starting immediately, in recognition of the urgency of the threats facing the UK. We have tasked it to consider those threats—the noble

Baroness, Lady Smith, raised this—as well as the capabilities we need to address them and the state of our Armed Forces and the resources available.

This is to be Britain's review, not just the Government's. We will consult widely across the defence community and are keen that everyone who wants to, including every Member of this House, can contribute should they wish. It would be nonsense for us not to draw on the expertise and experience of this House. As the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Houghton, reminded us, this review gives us a real opportunity to move forward, to take stock of where we are, to look at the threats that have emerged from Ukraine and elsewhere, and to move on from that.

As the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, said, we need to address the changing face of warfare—to address not last the last war but the next war. We need to be strong and determined in finding a way to meet those threats; that is in all our interests. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Peach—I know he had to apologise for leaving—pointed out that we need to learn the lessons of Ukraine now. The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, mentioned the technologies of the future, artificial intelligence and where that will take us. We need to understand all of that. The noble Lord, Lord Howell, said that we need to protect that, in an appropriate way, from those who would look at it and do us harm. But that should not stop us trying to take that forward.

I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Smith—although this was raised by a number of other noble Lords—that the nuclear deterrent remains sacrosanct within that review, and we and those who listen to our debates should remember that. The noble Viscount, Lord Trenchard, mentioned AUKUS, which remains sacrosanct within that. It is an important alliance for us and we will take it forward, as well, obviously, as our support for Ukraine. We also mentioned the global combat aircraft, and I repeated the Government's position that we continue to progress on that. But, alongside all these programmes, my noble friend's strategic defence review will take place. That gives us the opportunity to move forward.

We talked about defence spending, and in his excellent speech, the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, rightly challenged the Government. So did the noble Baronesses, Lady Goldie and Lady Smith, my noble friend Lord West, the noble Lords, Lord Empey and Lord Robathan, and many others. But we are determined, and it is a tough choice to say, "We will do what is fiscally responsible. We will do what we think we are able to do". So, we have made a cast-iron commitment to move to 2.5% of GDP. I know everyone will then say, "Why don't you make it 3%? Why not 3.2%?" We are being fiscally responsible, saying we will operate on the basis of 2.5% of GDP. But the crucial point is that we want the SDR to tell us where that money should be spent and what capabilities we should use to meet the threats as we go forward.

It seems to me to be common sense that if you have a review that is telling you what you need to develop and what you need to spend your money on to meet those threats, you wait for that review to start to tell you the answers to those questions rather than your Lordships coming to me in a year, two years, three years

or four years, asking, "Why have you spent money on a project that doesn't meet the threats that this country faces?" That is the argument that the Government are making. It is not trying to delay or fudge; it is not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes. It is simply saying that we want to move forward in way that is acceptable.

Many of your Lordships have raised Ukraine and NATO. Again, we have laid out our position time and again, and we are grateful for the support from His Majesty's Opposition with respect to Ukraine. As many noble Lords have pointed out, the front line of our defence of freedom as it stands is what is happening with respect to Ukraine. That is why the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and so many senior members of government and senior politicians from across this Parliament have gone to Ukraine, spoken to Ukrainians and supported them with respect to the war that they are fighting. It needs to be said again and again to the British people—not just to the British politicians but to the people of this country and Europe and freedom-loving peoples across the world—that the defence of what they enjoy is taking place in Ukraine. That is why the announcement of £3 billion every year to continue to support them is very important.

A number of your Lordships, including the noble Lords, Lord Jay and Lord Jopling, and many others, talked about the importance of the United States and NATO. The United States is crucial to us. Whoever the American President is, we will need to try to work with them in the defence of the things that are important to us. That is the history that we have, and it will be the history that we need to take forward. It is a matter for the American people who that person is, but we will need to work with them, whoever it is. The one calculation that Putin made when he attacked Ukraine was that NATO would fracture, splinter and disappear, but he got it wrong, because rather than it weakening NATO, it strengthened it. Who would have predicted Sweden and Finland joining? But they did. They did it not as an aggressive act—NATO is not an aggressive alliance; it is a defensive one, and we should be proud that NATO is standing tall for the freedoms and liberties that we all stand for.

NATO is really effective. It highlights many of the defensive alliances that we have across the world. Many of your Lordships have raised alliances, including the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, and the noble Lords, Lord Stone, Lord Newby, Lord St John, Lord Swire and Lord Bilimoria. We cannot defend those alliances and the freedoms that I have been speaking about without our allies, not just in Europe but across the world, or tackle issues in the Indo-Pacific and with respect to China, as mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on many occasions.

I say to the noble Lord that I do not know fully exactly what the Government are now doing with respect to Hikvision. I will have a look at that and write to him. I will find that out and put it in the Library, because the noble Lord has raised it on numerous occasions. He will know that the Government's policy is to co-operate, to challenge and to—I have forgotten the third one; whatever the third one is. My noble friend cannot remember either. I shall have a look and tell you before the end.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent (Lab): Compete.

Lord Coaker (Lab): It is to compete. To co-operate with, challenge and compete with China is essential. The important point that I want to make to the noble Lord, Lord Alton, is that obviously we will compete with them, and obviously we will co-operate, but we will challenge and we will stand up to China where necessary with respect to freedoms in Hong Kong and calling for the release of people as appropriate. I say that to him, because I know that he cares deeply and represents an opinion. But the “challenge” bit is really important.

With respect to the Middle East, which is of incredible importance to all of that, within a fortnight of being appointed, our Foreign Secretary travelled to Israel and to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to play our part in efforts towards long-term peace and security in the Middle East. We are calling for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and the protection of civilians, as well as the unfettered access that is needed to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza rapidly. The Foreign Secretary met families of hostages, including those with links to the UK, and he announced a further £5.5 million this year to fund the charity UK-Med's life-saving work.

UNRWA has been fully funded, or the funding has been restored. I will just say to the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, that we have been assured by the UN that the concerns that were raised, and the very serious matters raised with respect to employees' involvement in the attacks on 7 October, have been dealt with.

I say to the noble Lord, Lord Leigh, that there is no equivalence between Hamas and the Israeli Government. That is our position, as it was the position of the last Government. I know that the noble Lord is, rightly, extremely exercised about that—but I say clearly again, because I know that it is of immense importance to him and to lots of other Members of your Lordships' House, that there is no equivalence. I am sorry for repeating that, but it is really important. There is no

equivalence between Hamas and the Israeli Government, and I hope that that reassures him and reassures many of the people he speaks to with respect to that.

As I said, we need a further meeting. There are many other points of principle that need to be discussed, not least the point raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, about women, the work that she has been doing in Brazil and our attendance at the summit. That point about violence against women and girls is absolutely fundamental to everything that we do. Other noble Lords made points about the importance of the Commonwealth, and the various conferences coming up with respect to that are really important as well.

I conclude by saying that our debate reflects a startling global landscape and many complex and urgent challenges. We are living in an increasingly volatile and dangerous age, with rapidly evolving technology, which is simultaneously being used to undermine us and make us stronger. While the landscape is dark, the future is bright. I know that the wisdom in this House will be a valuable asset to the Government as we reconnect with our allies, forge new partnerships and advance our progressive values, upholding human rights and international law at home and abroad and delivering security and prosperity for Britain and its allies. That is something that we have done throughout our history, of which we are all proud and in which we are all united. That is the message that is to be heard from this Chamber today—so let it ring out to freedom-loving peoples across Europe and the rest of the world. We will never stand idly by as those treasured freedoms are challenged. With our allies across the globe, we will defend them and deter aggression. In that effort, all of us from every corner of this Chamber are united, and that should be heard loud and clear.

Motion agreed nemine dissentiente, and the Lord Chamberlain was ordered to present the Address to His Majesty.

House adjourned at 6.18 pm.