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

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House of Lords

Friday 9 May 2025

10 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham.

80th Anniversary of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan

Motion to Take Note

10.06 am

Moved by Lord Coaker

That this House takes note of the 80th Anniversary of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Coaker) (Lab): My Lords, it is a great honour to open this debate. Values of patriotism, family and community are sometimes regarded as old-fashioned, but this milestone 80th anniversary of VE Day reminds us that they are as relevant today as they ever have been. I have seen at many events up and down the country one thing standing out: so many children involved, as well as people from all walks of life, with pride in our country, what we stood for then and what we stand for now. We often talk of what divides us, but the struggles and fights of the past give us the foundations and provide us with the social glue that binds us and hold us together. Britain must defend international freedoms now as it did then, and that is worth remembering. It is something of which we can all truly be proud.

I pay particular tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Christopher, who is not in his place but is I believe the only current parliamentarian to have served in World War II. I equally pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Soames, who is in the Channel Islands. What a great testimony he is to his grandfather in the work that he has continued. I also pay tribute to the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, and his grandfather's role in VJ Day and beyond. As with the noble Lord, Lord Soames, I think both grandfathers would be extremely proud of their grandsons.

VE Day, 8 May, is one of the most iconic days in our history. At 3 pm, the nation tuned in as the Prime Minister, the right honourable Winston Churchill—our great leader of our greatest generation, who steered Britain through the war and built the allied coalition that defeated fascism—took to the airwaves and informed the nation that, yesterday morning at 2.41 am, German officials had signed the Act of unconditional surrender of all German land, sea and air forces in Europe, declaring that day as Victory in Europe Day. Later, from a balcony in what is now His Majesty's Treasury, draped with a union jack he addressed a sea of jubilant faces that filled every square inch of Parliament Square, Whitehall and the streets beyond. As Churchill held up a V for victory and people below him waved handkerchiefs, rattles and small union flags, small groups formed

circles and danced, not unlike the pictures and footage we have seen this week of jubilant crowds and delighted children up and down the country, running around with flags in hand.

People rejoiced, having come through our nation's darkest hour with courage, ingenuity and the Dunkirk spirit—through the Battle of Britain and the Battle of the Atlantic, through punishing campaigns in north Africa and Italy, and through D-Day, Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge. People rejoiced, with gratitude for all those who had delivered that victory, far too many of whom were no longer alive to share in it—gratitude for the brave soldiers, the pilots in sheepskin jackets, the courageous sailors of the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy, the clever code breakers and intelligence officers, the ingenious engineers and industrialists, the firefighters, and all those who worked tirelessly on farms, in armament factories and in other crucial roles on the home front, including many millions of women, whose nation also needed them. They embraced a long-overdue opportunity and redefined their role in society for evermore.

On hilltops, people lit beacons as, in cities and towns across the country, friends, acquaintances and strangers, first united by a common enemy, were now united in joy. They came together to dance long into the night, celebrating the triumph of the allied forces over the axis powers and the triumph of hope over despair, of freedom over tyranny, and of democracy over dictatorship. Let that inspire us now as we face the challenges of today. This country will never step back from defending our freedoms and democracy. But Winston Churchill, in his own words, knew that we could allow ourselves, only a “brief period of rejoicing” and could

“not forget the toil and efforts that lie ahead”,

because Japan remained unsubdued. The conflict in the Far East, a far too often overlooked theatre of war where more than 50,000 British personnel were killed, would rage for a further four months. The contribution of so many of our Commonwealth friends and allies must not be forgotten. It raged until another allied endeavour, the Manhattan Project, brought the costly six-year conflict to a deadly and decisive end.

Today, we debate freely in the mother of all Parliaments, exercising the rights and freedoms secured by our parents, our grandparents and that generation then. If noble Lords will forgive my indulgence, this included Troop Sergeant Major Vernon Coaker, of 3 Commando—the uncle I never met. He stormed Sword Beach at 8.30 am on D-Day and helped to seize the critical bridges over the Caen canal and river. He cleared German forces out of the nearby village of Amfreville and was left in charge of his entire troop when his CO headed off to scout their next mission, only to return at 8.30 pm that evening to find Sergeant Major Coaker lying in the road near the post office, killed by an enemy mortar—killed alongside 4,441 allied casualties on D-Day alone.

Writing years later, his commanding officer, Captain Keith Douglas Ponsford, noted of my uncle: “We had lost a fine soldier, who had been in many 3 Commando operations, including the attack on Saint-Nazaire”. My family's story, shared by so many others—no doubt including many in this Chamber, as well as across our

[LORD COAKER]

country—is one that reminds us all of that sacrifice. I will never forget that grave in Ranville War Cemetery, near Caen, alongside many other graves, which states: “God bless Sergeant Vernon Coaker, killed on 6 June 1944, aged 23”.

Eighty years later, this generation has become the latest to come together to thank our greatest generation. On behalf of the Government, but I know also on behalf of all of us here, I thank all those up and down the country who have organised and been involved in the commemorations over recent days. In particular, I thank colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport and the MoD, members of our Armed Forces who have been out in all their splendour—what a great credit they are to our nation—the amazing staff of the Royal British Legion and other military charities and associations, and the organisers of street parties and events right across our nation.

Today, it is incumbent on us not only to reflect on and appreciate the millions of individual sacrifices that secured our freedoms, but to learn lessons about our security, solidarity and service that will serve us well in this dangerous era in which we live. On security, Neville Chamberlain quickly became shorthand for the folly of appeasement. Over time, more and more historians have convincingly pointed out that Britain was in no position to stand up to Hitler in September 1938. The lesson today, which needs to be fully understood and is accepted by many of us, at least, is that, if we want peace in our time and in the future, we can never again take our eye off the importance of deterrence, particularly as potential adversaries arm themselves to the teeth.

That appreciation underpins our review and, should President Trump be successful in his efforts to bring peace to Ukraine—we hope he will be—enhanced deterrence in Ukraine and across Europe and NATO will be the decisive factor in securing peace in Europe again and preventing further Russian aggression. As we celebrate VE Day, let us also remember the strength and courage of the Ukrainian people and all those who have supported them in resisting the illegal invasion of their territory.

The second lesson from the war that I want to touch upon is solidarity: the importance of solidarity with our allies, the importance of solidarity with those who serve—some here will know about that better than me—and the importance of the solidarity of our nation. The wartime platform given by Germany to Lord Haw-Haw illustrates the enduring power of propaganda. I believe that it is incumbent on all of us, in this Chamber and beyond, who love this country and believe in Britain to ensure that the British people are in no doubt: our solidarity is under ongoing, sustained attack from today’s propagandists and armies of bots, armed with infinite supplies of disinformation, under the command of adversaries like Russia and other states working against our interests. It should never take a war for us to speak out about such attacks and the fact that we will defend ourselves against them. Like previous Governments, we are alive to this threat, which is an existential one. Our review will guide us as we step up work to counter it.

The other lesson that I want to draw is about service: it is about the power of individual and collective service, and valuing those who serve. The relentless determination of that war generation, who gave their blood, toil, tears and sweat—and, indeed, their lives—over six long years, was summed up by Churchill when he said: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts”. We must have that courage, will and determination, and, even many years after, we must listen to the words of Churchill as they ring down the ages. Our current Armed Forces are full of people who have these and other war-winning qualities in abundance. They are people who have stepped forward to serve, with the support of families who also sacrifice to facilitate the long deployments and frequent moves that service life can entail.

We all need to realise this threat today. Too few people who are going about their busy lives perhaps truly appreciate that, and this VE Day celebration gives us all the chance to understand those sacrifices made on our behalf. We are determined to change that, and we are working with the support of others to ensure that the Armed Forces covenant is fully implemented. We are, with the support of Parliament, appointing an Armed Forces Commissioner as an independent champion tasked with improving service life. This is also why commemoration is so important. We must remind each generation of the sacrifices made in the past for our freedoms—sacrifices that are still being made today by members of our Armed Forces and the families who support them.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a new chapter, a chapter written by the men and women who turned our darkest hour into one of our finest hours; men and women who had witnessed the absolute worst of humanity—as my noble friend Lord Dubs can no doubt tell us about—and the worst of what people can do to each other, but were determined to use their hard-won freedoms to build a better future. They were the architects of the United Nations, of NATO and of greater European co-operation, while at home, they built homes for heroes, the NHS and the welfare state. They built global institutions and improved lives in Britain, in an attempt to ensure that the sacrifices of that generation would be honoured, never forgotten, never repeated. Today, we come together to remember and honour the proud legacy of our greatest generation and recommit to upholding it. Is it not that recommitment, that determination, that pride, that gives us the hope and belief that this great nation is once more the standard-bearer for freedom and democracy?

Just think of it: what a tribute that is to those who have served in our service. It moves us all. As we put down the flags, banners and slogans, let us once again remind ourselves that we will never put down our values; we will always stand up for those values. That is what makes this country great. On days like this, it reminds us of what unites us.

I am very proud to move this Motion today, and I know it is supported by everyone across the House. What a great country we are, and what a brilliant celebration we have had over the past weeks. Communities have come together, standing up for those things that

bring us together—notwithstanding some of the debates and arguments that take place. Think of our reputation across the world as the pictures of the King saluting the troops and others as they came down the Mall were shown, of the public cheering and of the various events across our nation, which have shown that the great nation we are still exists. I beg to move.

10.21 am

The Earl of Minto (Con): My Lords, what an honour it is to follow the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in this most apposite of debates. I thank him for moving the Motion to commemorate the final surrender of the malign Nazi forces and their acolytes, which brought to a conclusion such a notable period of this nation's history. It is indeed, as it was then, a time of celebration, remembrance and deep reflection.

It was 80 years ago yesterday when our great war leader, the roaring lion, stood at this very Dispatch Box and announced to this Chamber—which was at the time the House of Commons—that the evil that had descended upon Europe had been defeated. This was, of course, the culmination of five and a half years of sustained and bitter fighting and unspeakable violence; five and a half years of the British public sacrificing so much in support of the war effort; five and a half years of families—virtually every family—being torn apart.

This week we pay tribute to our forebears who stood firm against the menace of tyranny, who did not and would not flag or fail, and who went on to the bitter end in defence of all of our freedoms. But it is the events of the week leading up to that eventual surrender of the German forces that I would like to reflect upon today.

On 5 May 1945, a Lieutenant S Charlton of the 53rd Reconnaissance Regiment was instructed by his commanding officer to investigate reports of a concentration camp nearby their posting just outside Hamburg. Lieutenant Charlton was the first British officer to arrive at Neuengamme concentration camp. What he uncovered there was demonstrable evidence of the repugnant wickedness of the Nazi regime, a horrifying microcosm of the very reason why it was so vital to overcome the enemy. After cautiously approaching the camp, he found it deserted apart from a lone police officer guarding the entrance. As he was inspecting the barracks, he encountered two former prisoners who offered to guide him through the camp.

Lieutenant Charlton recounted in his report that he stumbled across a building that, at first glance, he believed was a butcher's shop or a dairy. It was not. Later, the building was found to have been a medical experimentation centre where Dr Kurt Heissmeyer had undertaken live experiments on 20 Jewish children towards the end of 1944. Those children were injected with tuberculosis, operated on and eventually hanged at the Bullenhuser Damm school on 20 April 1945, just weeks before the arrival of British troops and the liberation of Neuengamme. Charlton remarked in his report that the place appeared to have been thoroughly cleaned. He found only rubber gloves and what he took to be a preserved human heart in a bottle.

From the records salvaged from the camp and the testimonies at the later war crimes trials, a more comprehensive account of the horror that occurred at Neuengamme was pieced together. The camp was built in 1938 by 100 inmates transferred from Sachsenhausen. Prisoners were forced to work in weapons factories, in mines, on building sites or on the railways, labouring under the most inhumane of conditions. Evidence collected by the British Army of the Rhine's war crimes group described the almost complete absence of footwear and the transportation of prisoners too sick to work to the death camps for their ultimate and untimely murder. Overall, it is estimated that at least 42,000 prisoners died at the camp. But since the SS destroyed most of the records, in reality we will never really know how many suffered there.

Neuengamme was just one of the many concentration camps liberated by allied troops throughout 1945. The stories uncovered by brave British, American and Soviet troops, and the testimonies given by those who suffered so terribly, ensured that Nazi war crimes did not go unpunished and guaranteed that they could be shared for all prosperity, if for no other reason than to ensure that such horror was called out so that it should never be countenanced to happen again. As early as 1940, in his "finest hour" speech, Churchill warned of

"a new dark age made more sinister ... by the lights of a perverted science".—[*Official Report, Commons, 18/6/1940; col. 60.*]

He saw clearly the evil of Nazi rule and what it was, and nobly led our nation—along with our stout allies—throughout the storm of war.

It was two days later, on 7 May 1945, that Germany finally capitulated. The Soviet army had already taken Berlin and Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery had accepted the surrender of German forces in north-west Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. Facing mounting pressure on all fronts, General Jodl arrived in Reims at the behest of Admiral Dönitz to offer the unconditional surrender of all German forces. The final instrument of surrender was then signed in Berlin the following day, with Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, later a member of your Lordships' House, signing on behalf of the allies. The war in Europe had come to an end.

Across Britain, church bells rang out in recognition of the enormity of the occasion. Victory in Europe was declared. The British public jubilantly poured on to the streets, as the Minister mentioned, to celebrate their victory over Hitler's forces of fascism. The victory was momentous, but the cost had been terrible and enormous. Some 383,600 British troops were estimated to have lost their lives. There had been 1.7 million casualties from across the Commonwealth. For many, those bells must have rung hollow.

On this very day 80 years ago, as has just been mentioned, Nazi forces were expelled from the only occupied territory in the British Isles. Throughout the war, the occupied Channel Islands had faced severe repression, with satellite camps of Neuengamme established on Alderney. The liberation of our dear Channel Islands was completed when British soldiers from HMS "Bulldog" and HMS "Beagle" landed on Guernsey and Jersey. Across the islands, the union

[THE EARL OF MINTO]

flag was hoisted and the crowds spontaneously sang the national anthem. Liberation Day is still to this day celebrated in joyous fashion every year on 9 May on those islands.

From the balcony of the Ministry of Health, 80 years ago, Churchill reminded the nation:

“This is not victory of a party or of any class. It’s a victory of the great British nation as a whole. We were the first, in this ancient island, to draw the sword against tyranny”.

Those words are ever more pertinent today. War has returned to Europe. An ascendant autocracy threatens sovereign nations, and poisonous ideologies pervade our politics. If there were ever a lesson to be learned, it is that we British can never appease a tyrant. Our Ukrainian brothers and sisters are valiantly resisting invasion—fighting, as we once did, for their homeland and their freedom—and we are there to support their struggle in the shadow of remembrance of 80 years ago.

In these troubling times, we must once again stand firm against tyranny and express great pride in our Armed Forces. The Minister spoke so eloquently about our history and the importance of communal remembrance and reflection. This day, of all days, is also one of celebration of affirmative triumph over almost unspeakable evil. As His Majesty said last night, we must never forget those who delivered that triumph. My Lords, we will not.

10.29 am

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, only the oldest of us can remember VE Day—still less the Second World War itself. Exceptionally, the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, will be able to remind us. For our grandchildren, this is relatively ancient history, and the issue for us is what aspects of that history we choose to emphasise. What lessons should we say they should learn from the chaos, the cruelty, the slaughter and the sacrifice, the final victory and the contested peace that followed?

The two world wars remain central to Britain’s national identity. My own grandchildren have been learning about them in school over the past year. We have taken them to the Western Front, to walk over the fields where in the spring of 1918 my 18 year-old father joined the Highland Division and lost so many of the friends he had trained with. We have taken them to Bletchley Park, where my parents-in-law worked during the Second World War. We tried to explain to them what it meant to my mother to lose her younger brother—my godfather—when his Lancaster crashed on a training flight. For all of us, linking historical narratives to personal stories is a way to help the younger generation understand the past.

I have been struck by how quickly my grandchildren understood that neither war was one in which Britain actually stood alone. There are monuments to Canadian and Australian troops on the Western Front, and we saw references to French, Portuguese, Indian, Moroccan and Belgian troops alongside the British, and to the Chinese Labour Corps that maintained British tanks in 1918 and dug trenches and graves. Some 20 years later, Poles provided crucial help for decryption in the early stages of Bletchley Park, and an American

contingent arrived there in 1942. There were Polish fighter squadrons in the Battle of Britain, when Britain was “standing alone” against the German threat, and I was surprised to discover when we visited the Yorkshire Air Museum that there were a great many Belgian pilots in Bomber Command.

The Imperial War Museum’s display on World War II shows us something of the Caribbean contribution to Britain’s war effort, in all three armed services. I felt it underplayed the importance of the 2.5 million Indians in the British Imperial Forces, and the role Indian divisions played in Burma and the Eighth Army, fighting—alongside Polish and South African divisions, as well as the American Army—across North Africa and Italy.

Recalling this part of our wartime history matters because the descendants of those Allied soldiers and airmen have now become part of our national community. My parents-in-law are buried in a Bradford cemetery alongside well-kept Polish and Ukrainian sections, the latter containing the bodies of displaced persons—we used to call them “DPs”—unable to go back to their homeland as the Russians reasserted hostile control. I have met many Sikhs and south Asian Hindus and Muslims in Yorkshire whose grandparents fought for Britain in World War II, most of their grandchildren and neighbours unaware of what they did. This should now be an intrinsic part of our historical understanding of today’s British national identity.

What should we tell today’s children about why we fought the war, beyond the immediate threat of Nazism? We should teach them about the war aims that the British and Americans agreed on behalf of the world’s beleaguered democracies. The Atlantic Charter, drafted by the British and revised by the American President, declared in August 1941 that its countries

“seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; ... they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned; ... they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security”.

President Roosevelt’s speech to the US Congress earlier that year had spelled out why the United States was already acting as “the arsenal of democracy”. He said:

“We look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point ... that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world. ... The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society”.

Yesterday, our Defence Secretary reminded us also of Ernest Bevin’s Western Union speech, delivered to the Commons on 22 January 1948 as the Cold War began to end the hopes that the victory of 1945 would lead to global peace. Bevin declared that

“the free nations of Western Europe must now draw”

closer

“together. ... Our sacrifices in the war, our hatred of injustice and oppression, our Parliamentary democracy, our striving for economic rights and our conception and love of liberty are common among us all. Our British approach ... is based on principles which also appeal deeply to the overwhelming mass of the peoples of Western Europe ... If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time, we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy in the West and inspire respect elsewhere, and this means that Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite separate from those of her European neighbours”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 22/1/1948; cols. 395-97.]

I listened to Nick Thomas-Symonds, our Europe Minister, also quoting those words a few weeks ago.

We all recognise how far short our world today has fallen from these ideal objectives. The current US President has repudiated Roosevelt’s international and domestic legacies. Globalisation has spread global prosperity but has also fed a degree of inequality within and between states which threatens social cohesion and leaves too many unfree from want. We are learning again the lesson of the 1930s that constitutional democracy and open societies are not the natural order. Populist politicians offer easier answers, and authoritarian regimes are hard to dislodge.

Our British public do not yet appreciate how difficult are the domestic and international challenges we now face. We have managed to hold taxes down by skimping on public investment and cutting defence expenditure to fund the rising cost of health and welfare for our ageing society. Now, we have to raise defence spending and engage our citizens in national security. The war in Ukraine is a threat to our security to which we must respond. The Chinese drive to dominate global manufacturing and high technology also requires greater public and private investment. Yet there are populists out there still pretending that taxes can be cut while spending more on defence and without cutting public services.

History does not repeat itself, but it does offer warnings. Our divided and complacent country in the 1930s was slow to respond to the threat of authoritarian fascism and Nazism. We now face threats to the liberal international order that Roosevelt and Churchill led the allies to build, and to the peaceful Europe that the end of the Cold War promised. Temporarily or permanently—we hope only temporarily—we have lost American support and leadership. It is our shared duty to work together to carry the public with us, and to work with our democratic allies, in Europe and beyond, to defend the principles for which our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents fought more than 80 years ago.

10.39 am

Lord Craig of Radley (CB): My Lords, I too join in all the fulsome expressions of praise for and amazement at the bravery and efforts made by so many, both in and out of uniform, to contribute to victory—victory in Europe and, following the use of nuclear bombs, victory in the Far East.

If I may be permitted a brief personal reflection, I was two weeks short of my 10th birthday when the war started in 1939. I was living in Dublin. The Irish Free State, as it then was, was determined to remain neutral, and did so throughout the conflict—but that

did not stop many thousands of my fellow countrymen crossing to the UK to volunteer and join one of the three services. My father had lost all of his right leg in the First World War, otherwise he too might have wished to join up again. But for myself and my sister, life continued much as usual. There was no food rationing. We had recently acquired a family car, but it was on blocks, as petrol was unobtainable. A very few cars had been converted to run, rather reluctantly, on gas, and they required an enormous storage balloon on their roof for fuel. For us and the rest, we depended mostly on trams and bicycles or, in the countryside, ponies and traps to get about.

For many of our age, life continued with but few changes from before the war started. We can contrast that with the destruction to life and, at times, the sheer terror of those exposed to the blitz, and those who lost loved ones. Many children living in the Home Counties were evacuated and separated from their parents and friends—an experience shared by a friend of mine of over 50 years’ standing. Meanwhile, in Ireland, we and our contemporaries seemed by and large distant from defeats and victories as they unfolded. News coverage was by newspaper or radio only, as TV had yet to reach into Ireland. I have no recollection of being encouraged to listen to news bulletins.

I doubt that today’s youth would be able to remain as detached as we and other young people in southern Ireland were in the early 1940s. Media in all its guises today tends to keep one’s undivided attention on what is happening, especially if were of the scale of another world war or major conflict. But it is also true that the direction of the media coverage has so much bearing on what is highlighted or what may be, as it were, left to one side. Media management of coverage has such an important part to play in so much of life today. The real challenge is that the truth it purports to relay is truly the same truth, whether it comes from the front line, a command headquarters or one or more of the nations’ capitals involved in the conflict. Any difference becomes the story of itself, and is ever more difficult to manage as the speed and global nature of information expand. Maybe this is a new challenge for AI. It is all too often a cause of serious, if passing, embarrassment, and more, for those involved.

To finish, today we meet to remember with true admiration those who answered the call of duty—those who were prepared to sacrifice all for the freedom and democracy of future generations. As we, the beneficiaries, honour, salute and thank them, so must we all, as much now after 80 years as we did after a single year, remember them.

10.43 am

The Lord Bishop of Peterborough (Maiden Speech): My Lords, it is a privilege to be making my maiden speech today. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, for opening this debate and for the encouragement for us to mark and reflect such an important anniversary. It is an honour to follow such moving speeches.

Before saying any more, I take the opportunity to thank the many Members and staff of your Lordships’ House who have made me feel so welcome. I have been

[THE LORD BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH]

struck by the care that has been shown to help me to find my feet, and I am most grateful for the time taken to do so. I have been Bishop of Peterborough for just over a year, following four years as Bishop of Southampton, and I hope to bring experience from both dioceses as I take my place among your Lordships.

As we have heard, the 80th anniversary of victory in Europe and victory over Japan has been marked in our communities in a number of different ways. Across Peterborough diocese, there have been street parties in Northamptonshire; bunting in the beautiful villages of Rutland; and bells of churches ringing out, including from Peterborough Cathedral, which has always been a place of gathering at times of national significance and last night played its part again, drawing people together and helping them to remember.

It is the theme of remembering that I would like to focus on. Having begun full-time ministry as a family and children's worker over 20 years ago, I have been inspired by young people and the work that goes on in our local schools. As the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, said, it is so important for our children to understand the past. One of the most moving experiences that I had in parish ministry was an annual joint remembrance service that took place with our elderly midweek congregation and the year 2 children of our local church school. This was a genuine collaborative exercise, and each generation learned from it. For the seven year-old children, it brought to life their study of World War II, when they could hear personal stories of those who had lived through it, speaking to a woman who had been an evacuee or a gentleman who had served in the Army. The school lesson came alive for them, because these personal stories have power, like the one that the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, has just shared. For our seniors, it was a time for them to share their stories, to be listened to and to be given permission to talk about the hardships of their time. But there was more going on; as they listened, they could hear the hopes of young children, who in their own short lives already knew of recent conflicts, some of which were having a direct impact on two or three of them.

How do we change, how do we move on, if we do not remember and learn together? I suggest that putting ourselves into the shoes of others helps to turn an act of remembrance into something that can bring change for the future, as we learn from others. Peterborough diocese is linked with the diocese of Seoul in Korea, and our partnership is based on listening to one another and seeing life through the eyes of another. The Koreans' experience of war and conflict has shaped their theology and their worship, and we can learn from that. Two years ago, I had the privilege to visit the Anglican Church in Burundi, and again heard stories of strife and struggle. We also met many young people who are determined to ensure that life is different in the future. They taught us much about the transformation of relationships across different social groups. Young people give us hope for a different future.

Across Peterborough diocese, there are 103 church schools, with more than 20,000 students. These are places where children are encouraged to develop values that they believe will help society, ways of living that

will decrease conflict. One area that is being encouraged is that of courageous advocacy, promoting an ethos of action-taking, challenging injustice and becoming agents of change. As I play my part in your Lordships' House, I hope to be involved in the work of education and family life, supporting children and young people to become those agents of change and play their part in shaping the world to be a better place. That would indeed be a tribute to the people we remember today.

10.48 am

Lord Boateng (Lab): My Lords, it is an honour and a privilege to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough in this important debate. She brings not just a deep and abiding faith and a passion for community development, the growth of parish congregations and the pivotal role of young people in communities, in two dioceses, but her own personal experience, having been brought up in a rectory, and of working as a manager in the NHS. I have no doubt that she will make a hugely valuable contribution to this House.

This week and these proceedings are very much about memory and commemoration. It is my privilege to chair the Sir Winston Churchill Archive Trust and the Memorial Gates foundation and Memorial Gates Council. We in the trust are very much about ensuring that Sir Winston Churchill's personal papers are available and accessible to the nation and the world. Many Members of this House will recall that the Memorial Gates was founded by the late and much-loved Baroness Shreela Flather, who sat for so long on the Benches opposite and who gave so much to our nation's life. But her enduring gift was the Memorial Gates, which highlight and commemorate the particular contributions of the Commonwealth—and the Asian, African and Caribbean Commonwealth in particular—to the service of this nation. They need to be remembered. But both the archive trust and the Memorial Gates Foundation are not just about remembering of individuals, their service and in many cases, their ultimate sacrifice; they are also about remembering the cause which they served and the reason for that sacrifice.

That cause was most succinctly laid down in the Atlantic Charter, to which reference has already been rightly made. We hold in the archive trust—you can go and look at it on the website at any time; it is available generally and globally, and is particularly accessible to schools—the original documentation and the writings of Sir Winston around the charter. The charter represents the causes of self-determination, sovereignty, freedom and justice—the very causes that are at stake in so many places in our world at this time, and particularly on the continent of Europe.

We need to remember that cause. One man who did and who never forgot it was a member of the Royal West African regiment. His name was Joseph Hammond and he has written of his experiences in the 14th Army—our 14th Army of Great Britain in Burma. He served in that army; this weekend, he will be 100 years old, and his life and service will be commemorated in Ghana. I have had the privilege of meeting him—I grew up in the Gold Coast, which is now Ghana—and he has established a foundation, the heart of which is the cause of peace, development and education.

In memorialising, as we have done this week, surely one of the best things we can do is to make sure that, in the review of the curriculum that is currently taking place, the history and sacrifice, and above all the values that we are commemorating, are not lost for generations to come. That is something positive and practical we can do, and I hope that Ministers in responding will indicate that that will be their response to the review.

Joseph Hammond remembered the charter—self-determination, freedom and justice—and he, with other ex-servicemen of the 14th Army, coming back to the Gold Coast, then took part in the struggle for independence, because they took Churchill at his word. They fought for independence and they won, after a demonstration on 28 February 1948. Today in Accra, marking the spot where they demonstrated, there is a marble arch, and emblazoned on that arch are the words “Freedom and Justice”. That is what they fought for, what they won and what we must never forget, and we remember Joseph Hammond and all those others who died and who served.

Baroness Hunter of Auchenroch (Lab): My Lords, it is a great privilege to take part in this debate today—

Noble Lords: Oh!

10.56 am

Earl Attlee (Con): My Lords, I have been a Member of this House for 33 years, and I can tell the noble Baroness that I made exactly the same mistake. I was sitting on the Cross Benches and jumped up and made a speech in exactly the same way as the noble Baroness, and the noble Viscount, Lord Falkland, who was due to speak, did exactly what I did, which was sit down. Then, when I finished, he said, “The noble Earl made an excellent speech. What a pity he made it six places out on the speakers’ list”.

Rarely have I heard a Minister make such an effective and passionate opening speech for a government-led debate. I have to say, he is an absolutely excellent defence Minister, and I support everything that he said and his sentiments.

The VE 80 and VJ 80 days are a celebration of victory over our opponents in the Second World War. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity, alongside my noble friend Lord Soames of Fletching, to have represented our grandfathers at yesterday’s service in Westminster Abbey, and I am sure my noble friend shares my gratitude. I also very much enjoyed the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough. Sadly, I no longer live in her diocese.

Remembrance of the sacrifices made by British, Commonwealth and Allied servicepeople and civilians is key. We will remember them. But, in addition to remembering the sacrifices, hardship and cost, we must remember how we got ourselves into the Second World War. Of course, there are two main reasons. One was the effect of the Treaty of Versailles, and the other was the failure to rearm, or to rearm fast enough, in the face of an obvious threat.

We can easily understand why we were so reluctant then to rearm in preparation for war when the First World War was so terrible that no sane person would want to go through a war again. So, when we made our final ultimatum in 1939, our combat power when assessed by our opponent was insufficient to avert and avoid war—a point made so well by the Minister—and we paid a very high price for not rearming soon enough.

In the 1970s, many of the masters at Stowe School, which I attended, had served with distinction during the war. They had plenty of MCs or equivalent. They absolutely drummed into us that war was to be avoided at all possible costs. Nevertheless, in order to deter, they took great care to ensure that we understood how to defend ourselves if necessary. The CCF was very important to the school and was, at least initially, compulsory. I recall the reverend Jos Nicholl MC playing a key part in it.

When I came to your Lordships’ House in 1992, most of the senior Members of the House had tasted defeat and been hungry. Many had served with distinction during the war, and I recall Lord Healey, Lord Carrington, Lord Runcie, Lord Mowbray, Lord Lauderdale and Lord Jellicoe, to name just a few. There was even Lord Houghton of Sowerby, who had served in the First World War. Those noble Lords would never do anything that would allow us to be defeated, or, to use military parlance, to be fixed, again.

Happily, now, none of our leaders at the top have tasted defeat or been hungry, but the post-World War order that the Minister referred to, which led to this comfortable situation, is breaking down. We need to remember what happens if we do not rearm fast enough in the face of a clear threat, and we need to do much more to educate our people about some very hard choices that will need to be made if we cannot very soon stop state-on-state conflict in Europe.

11.01 am

Baroness Hunter of Auchenroch (Lab): My Lords, it is a great privilege to take part in this debate today, and I am so grateful to the noble Earl for his graciousness and generosity—I am afraid that I was just a little too keen. I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her excellent maiden speech, and it is always a pleasure to listen to my good friend, and old friend, Lord Boateng. When I looked at the list of the great speakers in this debate, I thought how lucky I was, and I look forward to hearing from you all.

Like many in your Lordships’ House—and, indeed outside it—I have been moved by the fly-pasts, the street parties, the concert last night and the King’s speech, among the many wonderful events in recent days to commemorate VE Day. As other noble Lords have said, the Second World War did not of course end until what is now known as VJ Day, following the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

I commend this opportunity—unprecedented, I am advised by the House of Lords Library—to mark VE and VJ anniversaries at once. I wish to address VJ Day

[BARONESS HUNTER OF AUCHENREOCH]

for personal reasons. I was born in Kuala Lumpur, a colonial child. My father, mother, grandparents, aunts and uncles, their many friends and work colleagues in Malaya, where they all lived, all served, and some died, in the Asian theatre. Many were killed or captured in the fall of Singapore, incarcerated in the notorious Changi prison or, worse, forced to work on the so-called death railway.

My father, Mac Hunter, a second-generation rubber planter, joined the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force at the outbreak of war and was called up following the Japanese invasion in December 1942. He fought his way down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore, chased by the formidable Japanese army. Of the 160 men in his unit, only 40 survived. He escaped in a fortuitously flat-bottomed fishing boat. In a letter a few weeks later, he wrote, “Five days out and up comes a sub, 100 yards in front of us, and looses off three torpedoes. Although I had been in action, ambushed, bombed, shelled, mortared, machine-gunned and several times almost captured, these were easily my worst moments. I honestly thought it was the end. But no, one passed in front and two went clean underneath. I arrived in Colombo in the clothes I stood up in and with 60 cents”. He spent the rest of the war in Force 136, the Far East branch of the Special Operations Executive, fighting behind enemy lines in the jungles of Burma and Malaya, training resistance units in intelligence-gathering, sabotage and hand-to-hand combat, and finally liaising with the forces parachuted in to negotiate the Japanese surrender in Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, my mother worked with her sister in the SOE cipher department, decoding signals in the allied HQ in Colombo. I salute the extraordinary courage of the men and women of the SOE in all theatres of the war.

I encourage everyone here, if you are ever in Thailand or Singapore, to visit the cemeteries and memorials in Kanchanaburi and Kranji and the museums in Hellfire Pass and the Ford factory, where the many thousands of military personnel and civilian prisoners who died are honoured. The walls of the Kranji memorial in Singapore are inscribed with the names of over 24,000 allied personnel whose bodies were never found, including the name of my mother’s first husband. I join other noble Lords in thanking the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for the extraordinary work it does.

We are all the beneficiaries of what the Second World War generation fought for in Asia, Africa and Europe. We have had 80 years of relative peace in a world bolstered and protected by the international institutions which they put in place—the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, NATO, GATT, the WTO and the EEC—a world of enduring alliances built on dreadful sacrifices by both sides in that war. As beneficiaries of their courage and sacrifice, and in their memory, we should keep this in the forefront of our minds.

11.07 am

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords we have heard some very fine speeches, and I shall use my brief five minutes for a personal memory, first, and then reflections on where it has all taken us and where it is taking us now.

First, I was in fact there on the glorious, crowded day of 8 May—there are fewer and fewer of us who can say that. My father had returned from three years away in the desert and Italy. He took me that morning to the top of the park, where we watched the parade along the Bayswater Road and the generals going by waving from their open cars. General Alexander was by far my father’s most favoured and admired leader and general. My father had come back unscathed, but I am afraid this was not the same for my wife’s father, who was killed in that war in the last days, along with all three of his brothers—in fact, an entire family more or less wiped out.

Later that day, my father had to go back to work somewhere in Whitehall, which was very odd, because it was supposed to be a national holiday. Of course, although he never told us or mentioned it, he was not working just in Whitehall; he was in fact in Mr Churchill’s War Rooms by St James’s Park, where the war was still being run from, staffed by a continuous duty roster of which he was part. I discovered this only some 20 years later, when the Cabinet Office released photos of him and his colleagues at their desks in the War Room, which was not open to the public until several decades later—or even its existence admitted. Years later, when I happened to be working in the Treasury, in an absurdly large office, I arranged to go down three floors in the lift to those rooms, which were still frozen in time, with my father’s desk there, and I noticed two lumps of sugar in the drawer, reflecting the shortage world that we all lived in and have long since forgotten.

Anyway, that was the end. There was a little sign on the wall saying that, on the morning of 15 August—VJ Day—two Japanese Zeros had been shot down in the Philippines; heaven knows what they were doing there. It was then blank—empty. The weekend roster was cancelled. It said, “This office is closed as of today”. It was the end of an era.

It is worth reflecting that our fathers and forefathers had learned a lot about peacemaking. They knew what people seem to have forgotten today: if peace is built on temporary factors or quick deals, it is worse than useless. It is no use getting assurances from pariah nations that intend to go straight back to aggression afterwards. The clear lesson from Ukraine about which we have all talked is that something will have to change inside Russia itself, which is now a pariah nation, if we are to get another 80 years—or eight years, or even eight months—of peace.

The foundations of peace have to be learned from 1945, now even more than then. In this age of drones and digital, war is now totally against civilians. It is not entirely the front line at all. The defence of civilians must be the total approach, not just a military matter, including in Ukraine. A vast amount of diplomatic effort is needed to get the whole world to grasp what is now at stake. The UN will of course have to be rebuilt, built on or replaced. Ukraine will have to be rebuilt, certainly with Russian funds.

Even the 56 nations of our Commonwealth are not united in seeing and understanding this. We should be concentrating much more on getting not just Europe but Asia and the vast Commonwealth network agreed on a common course and a common stance. I welcome

the India deal that has just been reported, which, despite the obvious problems, shows that the growing Commonwealth is alive, networking and very much part of the settlement that we are working towards for the future. I also welcome the US deal. I hope that it will last more than 24 hours; it should do, but we have to work on that as well. Finally, I hope that the new Pope will bring a dose of wisdom to a volatile America.

So perhaps there are some slim grounds for optimism beginning to emerge, particularly if we pay attention to those lessons from 1945 on how to build lasting peace. Let us hope, let us learn and let us remember.

11.12 am

Baroness Amos (Lab): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Coaker for an excellent opening speech and congratulate the right reverend Prelate on her maiden speech; I look forward to working with her in the House. I also thank those noble Lords who have spoken before me, many of whom shared their personal recollections.

This is a week that, for me—and, I know, for millions of others—will live long in our collective memory. There was the sight of our veterans, fewer and fewer of them each year, fragile but resolute; consider the sharpness of their recollections. There were moving stories and tributes. Then there was relief at the vanquishing of the tyranny and injustice that we saw in that period; the belief in a safe and secure future; and the remembrance of lives lost, hopes extinguished, and families, communities and countries torn apart and destroyed. There for us all to see were resilience, resistance and courage.

However, in the midst of the celebration and commemoration, I was reminded of the conflicts that still plague our world as we again face turmoil and insecurity in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia and, of course, on our own continent with Ukraine. I was reminded of the promise that we made ourselves—“Never again”—which puts the onus on us to resist tyranny, to challenge injustice and to do everything we can to bring peace and to find solutions to conflict. Our political engagement, diplomacy and foreign policy are more important than ever.

It is so important for us to defend democracy and to sustain our freedoms, but, as we celebrate Victory in Europe Day, I am also reminded that it was a world war. It involved so many—not just in Europe but in the Commonwealth, our overseas territories, the United States and the Far East. As my noble friend described so eloquently in terms of her own family, the battles occurred in many countries. I have personally seen the costs of conflict; I am very glad that I did not have to experience it personally.

This week has reminded me that we have so much still to do to make sure that our young people have a full understanding of our history. The noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, talked about the importance of education, because our history is sobering as well as uplifting. During World War II, African and Caribbean people made significant contributions to the war effort through military service; I thank my noble friend Lord Coaker for recognising the involvement of Commonwealth and other friends.

Let us recognise that their involvement had, and continues to have, a long-standing impact. The RAF lifted its colour bar and 6,000 black African men volunteered: 5,500 as ground staff and 450 as air crew. Approximately 10,000 men and women from the black Caribbean joined the British Army. Eighty women joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. The Royal Navy accepted no black crews. More than half a million Africans served in British uniform, with one-fifth involved in active combat. The RAF had squadrons from Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Trinidad and Jamaica.

People from Britain's colonies also contributed financially, through fundraising campaigns and donations. The country of my birth, Guyana—as well as the neighbouring country, Suriname—played a key role in terms of the bauxite produced there. Some 397 ships were lost in Caribbean waters, accounting for 20% of all the Allied ships sunk; the Caribbean was important because of its proximity to the Panama Canal.

However, even with those contributions—here, education is so important—racism and prejudice were everywhere. Black soldiers were relegated to support roles, whatever their capabilities. Post-war black veterans often struggled to receive support. In 1948, one such person, Tom Boatin—not Boateng, like my noble friend—was refused service at Rules restaurant and the Minister of Food had to intervene so that he could get an apology. We must embrace our whole history, imperfect as it is. It is what has made us who we are: vibrant, dynamic and diverse, with the strong sense of fair play and fairness and the love of freedom and justice that are so deeply embedded in our sense of who we are.

11.18 am

Baroness Laing of Elderslie (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Amos, who made some very important points. It is a privilege to take part in this debate.

Like most Members of your Lordships' House, I came into this world long after VE Day and have no recollection of 80 years ago. However, I have a vivid recollection of 30 years ago, when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of VE Day. I remember so well what it meant to my father, who was then only a few months away from the end of his life. It meant so much to him to know that, 50 years after he and his friends came back from a war in which he had fought from day one—from 1939 until 1946—the country and the world were remembering what they did and why it mattered.

My father used to impress upon us as children, “You must remember what happened. You must remember why it happened”. He would say to me, “You must know about this, because you must make sure that it does not happen again”. I am delighted to hear what the Minister has said this morning, because it echoes those sentiments of “Never let it happen again”.

Yesterday in Westminster Abbey, there was a moment when certain words brought a tear to the eyes of strong men. They were not the words of a general or an admiral, not even the words of Winston Churchill, but the words of the forces' sweetheart, Vera Lynn:

[BARONESS LAING OF ELDERSLIE]

“There’ll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of dover
Tomorrow
Just you wait and see ...
There’ll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of dover
Tomorrow ...
When the world is free”.

The Minister rightly mentioned that the victory of 80 years ago was the victory of the nation as a whole. There are memorials all over this country to brave servicemen and brilliant generals and admirals. There is no memorial to Vera Lynn. I am trying my best to carry the torch of the Dame Vera Lynn memorial campaign, not just because my father was one of those who adored the forces’ sweetheart; not just because I was brought up on a series of albums called “Hits of the Blitz”, “More Hits of the Blitz”, “The Best Hits of the Blitz” et cetera; but also because of a promise I made to Sir David Amess, my late colleague in the House of Commons, who started this campaign several years ago to raise the money for a memorial to Dame Vera Lynn. I promised Sir David that I would do what I could to help him in his efforts. You will remember that he was brutally murdered in the course of his duties as a Member of Parliament, so I feel a duty to carry on the work that he started.

A place for the memorial has been identified in Dover. Most of the funds for this wonderful memorial have been raised and the memorial is in production. It is not a boring old statue, but a rather wonderful bronze memorial encompassing not just one person but the many whose efforts we praise today, as so many people have said. However, more money is needed to finish the work that Sir David Amess started on the memorial to Dame Vera Lynn. So I am making an unashamed plea to the Minister, to your Lordships and, through your Lordships, to a wider audience. Much money has been raised by small donations from people who care, but £350,000 is still needed to put up a memorial to the forces’ sweetheart, to the person who embodied the spirit the Minister mentioned, of the will to carry on. Please help.

11.23 am

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, the commemoration of VE Day this week was a particularly poignant one, since it was probably the last major landmark at which we will see significant numbers of veterans. When the last human link to the Second World War is gone, there is a danger that the trauma of that time will move from being a lived community experience to a dry historical fact. If we allow that to happen, the lessons of history become weakened, and we increase the risk of repeating past mistakes. Remembrance is thus crucial to our understanding of not just the past but the present, and the perils of the future. Much of this week has been about remembering the courses and conduct of the war. However, important though that is, we must go further.

One of my regrets about the centenary commemorations of the First World War is that they largely ended with the anniversary of November 1918, marking the end of the fighting. We would have done well to reflect

much more than we did on the diplomatic and political failures of 1919 onwards, which set the conditions for the subsequent catastrophe that unfolded in the 1930s and 1940s.

The aftermath of the Second World War was very different. The effort that went into reconstructing societies, rebuilding political trust and creating an international order formed the context in which we have lived our lives ever since. That is the legacy of the Second World War generation, but that legacy is now at risk. Aggressive war is once more being waged in Europe. Meanwhile, the umbrella of American might under which we have sheltered for so long is looking, to say the least, somewhat leaky. We in Europe have for years neglected our own military power, relying on others to make up the deficit. Now we are being measured by events and found wanting, as we were in the 1930s.

NATO protected our societies through the long, testing years of the Cold War and it remains the best, indeed the only, credible instrument for ensuring our future security. But it is a different NATO from the one we have been used to. It is a NATO that must recognise the substantial shift of American power from Europe to the Indo-Pacific, a shift that will continue whoever occupies the White House. It is a NATO in which European members must shoulder a much greater share of the burden for their own security than they have done for many years.

There is growing acceptance of this truth, but we still fail to accept the consequences. The first is the need for us in Europe, particularly those with the larger economies, to spend much more on defence. By much more, I do not mean marginal increases but something in the order of twice what we currently spend. The second consequence is the need for a way of funding, developing, procuring and operating the strategic military capabilities for which we have for too long been over-reliant on the United States. It cannot be NATO, because not all members of the alliance are European. It cannot be the EU, because not all members of the EU are in NATO and not all European members of NATO are in the EU.

The Brussels-based think tank, Bruegel, recently published a paper proposing a different solution: a European defence mechanism. This would be a procurement agency that would in specified areas plan, fund and potentially own strategic enablers, which could then be committed to NATO. It would be achieved through an intergovernmental treaty along the lines of that which set up the European stability mechanism in response to Covid. Importantly, it would enable the UK to engage in the improvement of European defence capabilities as an equal partner, not as an adjunct to the EU—with all the limitations that come with such a status. This is the kind of innovative thinking we so desperately need in response to the serious challenges we face, and I commend it to the Minister.

This is a particularly appropriate moment to consider such matters. This week we commemorate the efforts and sacrifices of those who served this country, and European security more widely, throughout the Second World War. Yet there could surely be no better act of

commemoration than safeguarding their legacy for future generations by ensuring the continued defence of the freedoms for which so many of them, like Sergeant Coaker, paid such a bitter price.

11.29 am

Lord Pitkeathley of Camden Town (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to add a voice from one of the smaller corners of our national story; and I do so among so many moving and powerful speeches today, including from my noble friend the Minister and the impressive maiden speech from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough, whom I look forward to working with again.

Eighty years ago, the world breathed again. After years of darkness, brutality and sacrifice, peace was declared in Europe. On VE Day, and later, on VJ Day, nations rejoiced, and lives broken by war began slowly to mend. I rise with a small personal thread woven into that greater tapestry.

My mother, whom some of you will know, and her family are from Guernsey, one of the beloved Channel Islands—the only part of the British Isles to endure occupation by German forces during the Second World War, as the noble Earl has already reminded us. In June 1940, my noble kinswoman, then less than a year old, was, with just 24 hours' notice, bundled on to a boat leaving Saint Peter Port, along with half her family. The rest were either fighting abroad or chose to remain on the island and experienced, in some cases, including my own family's, the occupying forces taking over their homes.

Nearly five years later, on 8 May 1945, Winston Churchill gave his famous address to the nation. Among his words were these simple but profound

“our dear Channel Islands ... are also to be freed to-day”.

He was in fact a little premature. The islands would not be fully liberated until the following day, 9 May; a day that is celebrated every year in the Channel Islands and one that is also, by happy coincidence, my birthday.

Churchill's words, though a day early, brought immediate hope to a people who had waited so long for freedom. What transpired between those two dates tells us stories of hardship, suffering and extraordinary resilience. For nearly five years, the islanders lived in harsh isolation. Rations dwindled to near-starvation levels; electricity failed; civilians resorted to eating candle wax and rose hips to stay alive; and the elderly died cold in their beds. Some were deported to internment camps, never to return. Yet amid hunger and fear, they showed quiet, unwavering resolve. They held fast to their community, their customs and their humanity, even as the war stripped so much else away.

Today, as we mark the 80th anniversaries, we remember not only the great battles and sweeping victories but the quiet heroism, the perseverance of civilians under occupation, the stubborn endurance of small communities far from the centres of power and the enduring spirit that kept hope alive through the darkest years. In these uncertain times today, I take hope from their example.

The liberation of the Channel Islands reminds us that freedom must never be taken for granted, and that even in the most isolated places, the ideals of

liberty and justice burn just as brightly. We owe a debt of gratitude to all who fought, all who endured, and all who rebuilt. Their courage brought us our freedom. Our memory of them keeps that freedom alive.

11.33 am

Baroness Benjamin (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate on her wonderful maiden speech. I loved her focus on children; we are kindred spirits.

Yesterday, I had the honour and privilege of hosting the Royal British Legion VE 80 anniversary celebration at the National Memorial Arboretum, where veterans shared their vivid memories and experiences, and children creatively performed their vision of the past and hope for the future. Seeing them perform, I took great pride in being part of our great country.

It was important for me to host this emotional service, because it was a way of acknowledging my own family's contribution to World War II. Three of my uncles fought alongside the allied forces; two of them died; one went on to become the mayor of Bolton 50 years later. Today, as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, our hearts swell with pride and gratitude for all those who contributed to the allied triumph over tyranny.

But alongside the well-deserved celebrations, let us also take a moment to remember and honour a crucial part of that victory. That is the remarkable contribution of the Caribbean people, as other noble Lords have said. From the sunny shores of Jamaica to the vibrant islands of Trinidad where I was born, from Antigua, Barbados, the Cayman Islands and across the entire Caribbean, there was a deep sense of solidarity and commitment to the Allied cause. Thousands of men and women, driven by a profound belief in freedom and justice, stepped forward to play their part in the global conflict. They answered the calls to arms in many ways.

Some, like the late Sam King and Alford Gardner, bravely volunteered for the Royal Air Force, with over 6,000 men enlisting and hundreds becoming pilots, navigators, ground crew and rear gunners like the highly decorated Lincoln Orville Lynch. Imagine the courage it took to leave their homes and families, crossing vast oceans to face the horrors of war in the skies over Europe. Their skill and dedication earned them over 100 decorations, a testament to their bravery.

Others joined the Royal Navy and the perilous Merchant Navy, braving U-boat attacks to keep vital supply lines open. Still more enlisted in the British Army with the formation of the Caribbean Regiment in 1944. Although this regiment did not see direct combat, its service in Italy, Egypt and Palestine was a crucial part of the broader war efforts, freeing up other units for the front lines.

Beyond those who served in uniform, the Caribbean islands themselves became strategically important. They provided vital naval and air bases for the allies, playing a crucial role in the Battle of the Caribbean against German U-boats. Many Caribbean people worked tirelessly in those bases, supporting the war machine and defending their homelands. The contributions of

[BARONESS BENJAMIN]

Caribbean women were equally significant. Eighty women joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and 30 joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, serving with dedication and playing their part in the war efforts.

While Victory in Europe Day marked the end of the war in Europe, the sacrifices and contributions of the Caribbean people resonated far beyond. In Trinidad, they heralded victory by dancing in the streets to the music played on the newly created steel drums. Yes, they "jumped up" to steel pan music. Their bravery and commitment helped secure the freedoms we enjoy today.

As we celebrate this momentous anniversary, let us ensure that the story of the Caribbean contribution to World War II is never forgotten. Let us honour their courage, their resilience, and their unwavering dedication to the cause of freedom. The Caribbean people stood with Britain in its darkest hours, and their legacy deserves a place of pride in the history of VE Day and the Second World War. Let their story be told today and always.

11.37 am

The Earl of Dundee (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her excellent maiden speech.

With thankfulness, in commemorating our victory 80 years ago, I also join your Lordships in regretting the Second World War: its pain and suffering, its crimes against humanity and its tragedy of loss of life by millions of soldiers and civilians.

Briefly, I will touch on three points: deterrence against aggression afforded by defence alliances; the support of democracy by human rights institutions; and current outreach and education opportunities to strengthen international communities.

The first of these, such as NATO's deterrence, has, of course, so far been of limited benefit all the same, for since its intervention in 1949, conflicts and wars, human misery and destruction have persisted almost unabated.

The present concern is to bring peace to Ukraine in Europe, Gaza in the Middle East and Sudan in north-east Africa. The Government are to be commended for their current support in Ukraine. However, can the Minister tell us what further measures they intend to adopt to encourage lasting peace? Equally which actions will they now follow up in Sudan? Does she agree that, not least in view of the United Kingdom's popularity and respect dating from Sudan's successful years as a British protectorate, along with the United States and others we should launch further peace initiatives, including any such to enable the Taqaddum civilian movement to gather more strength and influence?

In spite of its inability to prevent these conflicts, we are still hugely indebted to NATO. Along with its nuclear capability, its defence alliance continues to be pivotal in preventing a third or major world war, while it offers hard-nosed deterrence to safeguard human freedoms.

For, unlike previous ad hoc military concordats between nations, or the unsuccessful international attempt of the League of Nations, instead it provides a brilliant combination of soft and hard power military defence; this is both effective and unprecedented: protecting freedom and democracy within nation states. Thus by 1989, as a Cold War legacy, it had assisted the release of central and eastern European states from totalitarianism.

After 1947, for winning over the United States to join NATO in the first place, much credit ought to go to the Attlee Government; it also should to a number of British diplomats, some later on to become Members of this House, such as Gladwyn Jebb, Derek Inychra and Roger Sherfield, who himself also helped to persuade the United States to deliver the Marshall Plan in 1948.

Owing to their common pursuit of these aims, human rights institutions, therefore, remain closely associated with NATO in any case. These include the United Nations, the ECHR and the Council of Europe, of which affiliation of 46 states I am a recent chairman of its committee for education.

Their shared human rights purposes have no doubt been forged by the catastrophe and experience of the Second World War. As the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, recalled, this was presciently expressed as early as January 1941 by President Roosevelt, who proposed four fundamental freedoms to which people "everywhere in the world" should be entitled:

"freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear".

This leads to our current challenge and opportunity. As Roosevelt implied, that is to reach out to international communities and to enable the four freedoms within them. Eighty-four years later in 2025 we are now in a much more convincing position for this to happen.

For will the Minister, when she winds up, perhaps agree that: collectively we have the consensus and solidarity of both G7 and G20 countries to advance that agenda; we have the digital technology to achieve useful and immediate outcomes; and increasingly, whether from British Commonwealth states or from those in the third world and elsewhere, we have the context and invitation of co-operation and partnership to become involved?

Following the United Kingdom's recent G7 presidency commitments given in 2021, can the Minister also say what plans the Government have, along with other operators, to co-ordinate the international delivery of relevant education and employment initiatives, otherwise at risk from financial cuts?

As we commemorate the Second World War victory today, and recall all those who fell in that conflict, including our own family members, whom most of us born later never knew, yet whose legacy and memory we now cherish, we may perhaps share a simple thought and resolve together: this is, that ever-strengthening deterrence against aggression must serve to protect human freedoms in all places and worldwide.

11.43 am

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I thank my noble friend for giving us this opportunity to commemorate all those who served in the Second

World War and to reflect on the values that they fought for. I compliment him on his powerful and very moving speech, as I do the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on his maiden speech.

That devastating conflict will soon pass from living memory. It is absolutely right that, on this 80th anniversary, we recognise Britain's role in securing the allied victory over Nazism, that we honour the sacrifice of so many and celebrate the legacy of peace that they fought to secure.

The many moving events over the last few days have been an important way of remembering those who lost their lives, but they have also been a celebration of peace. The wonderful Parliament Choir concert on Wednesday night was a powerful and poignant reminder of that in music and memories. All these events have given us the opportunity to revisit and reflect on the international co-operation and unity of purpose that brought about that peace and security.

This could not be more timely. In today's challenging international environment, where there have been many shifts in political power and balance, and a questioning of long-held alliances, it is all the more important that we stay clear-sighted about the need for international co-operation and indeed our commitment to NATO. Just as we shared 80 years ago, we still share with NATO's members the common values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. While we need to be realistic about the size of our Armed Forces and mindful of the changing times in regard to our historic leadership role in Europe, it is still vital that the UK speaks out to remind powerful others of NATO's values and to promote them whenever we can.

In recognising the contribution of millions of people across the UK and Commonwealth who served in the Second World War, it is also right to recognise that it was not only our Armed Forces who achieved those all-important victories in Europe and Japan 80 years ago. As we honour their sacrifice and reflect on the horrendous human cost of war, I pay tribute to the essential workers who could not fight and to all those who played their part on the home front.

By 1944, a third of the civilian population was engaged in war work, including more than 7 million women. Those women, aged between 18 and 60, had been conscripted since early 1941—either joining the services or working in industry, on the land or on the transport network. By 1944, more than 80,000 Land Girls were working across the country, ensuring that farms kept producing food for an island nation under siege.

Britain's highly effective mobilisation of civilians was largely due to Ernest Bevin. As Minister of Labour and National Service, he was responsible for manpower resources. Coal was an essential part of keeping the country running, and the so-called Bevin Boys were the 48,000 new military conscripts sent, after a random ballot, straight to the mines instead of to the forces to work long shifts in dangerous conditions, more or less unchanged since the First World War. The Bevin Boys wore no uniform, so were often thought to be avoiding conscription and were mistaken for Army dodgers by the police or public. They were not considered military

combatants and so, after the war, received no medals or recognition. Their contribution was only officially recognised by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1995, followed in 2007 with the award of a veterans badge by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Bevin was also responsible for the scheme that gave skilled workers in certain occupations exemption from military service. Many men of fighting age were kept at home to continue working in reserved occupations: doctors, police officers, teachers, railway and dock workers, mechanics and civil engineers. The amazing ambulance workers, when others had to flee to the shelters to escape the bombs, headed into them to rescue the wounded.

Many of these men felt that they had been left out of the action and resented not being able to do their bit on the front line, yet these often thankless jobs kept the country going through the disruption of war. We rightly remember them as we commemorate this 80th anniversary.

The collective spirit required to defend ourselves against and defeat Nazism that we are celebrating this week is still needed in today's challenging times. I applaud the Government's stance in promoting the importance of NATO and urge them to do everything in our power to keep this central to our long-term relationship with the US and across Europe.

11.48 am

Baroness Coffey (Con): My Lords, it is 80 years since World War II—a global war that touched every continent and many countries—came to a juddering halt with the deployment of nuclear bombs. Fortunately, we have never seen that again. The noble Baroness, Lady Hunter, spoke eloquently about the liberation of people from their inhumane treatment in Japanese prisoner of war camps, and my noble friend Lord Minto eloquently described the horrors of parts of the Holocaust and the liberation of a variety of camps. Of course, that was not the reason why we had gone into the war in the first place. It was our treaties, to try to save other countries and to defeat the tyranny that we saw rising.

For what it is worth, I think it is still relevant and important to make sure that we commemorate more on this day of remembrance and that we remember the ultimate sacrifice paid by many people, not only on these shores but around the world. That reminder is useful; it is about the celebration of the end of the war and the coming of peace. That is why it is critical that these events keep going in the summer, as a reminder that peace is worth working for, wherever it is in the world, and to do our bit to try to end conflict.

Recently, I was in Kenya and visited the Kakuma refugee camp. People are still arriving there. It was set up 30 years ago or so for the Lost Boys of Sudan, yet people are still arriving from the conflict in Sudan. I am conscious of the work the Government are continuing to do to try to bring peace there, but it is something we all must bear in our minds.

We have a visual reminder of how Parliament was affected by World War II. At the other end, on the outside of the Chamber, the entrance was never repaired. It is a deliberate reminder to Members of Parliament

[BARONESS COFFEY]

as they walk into that Chamber. I am very much touched by other very visual reminders of what happened in that time. Think of Coventry Cathedral. I grew up in the city of Liverpool, which suffered the Blitz very badly. I appreciate there will be other people here who were there. It so happened that my paternal grandfather was not deemed fit enough to go to war but, instead of being a shipbuilder, he rebuilt homes that had been bombed throughout Liverpool, and in the restoration afterwards.

If any of your Lordships have not been to a particular village in France called Oradour-sur-Glane, I strongly recommend it. The horrors of what happened to that village—the murder of people in the church—is why the French made sure it has been untouched ever since the day it was liberated. There is still a car there. It is a very visual memory of why we cannot afford for this to happen again, and yet we know it does.

My noble friend Lady Laing referred to the 50th anniversary. I remember it as a celebration of great joy, with both my parents and my sister. We were in London enjoying it. That was particularly the case because so many people were still alive who had been through it. I remember my father talking about his joy at the celebration of the end of the war. He had been evacuated but his brother got a bit homesick, so they ended up going back to Liverpool. He enjoyed the fact that the shelling had stopped. My mother had come back from India just ahead of the war. Her father was in the Army, her brother had been in RAF bombers, her sisters were in the Land Army, but her dad did not come back for several years afterwards because he was still in Egypt. So, family life did not get back to normal straight away. She remembers the pain of the rations that went on for many years. Nevertheless, in particular we should recognise that a few years on from that the Cold War began. That was also very telling, after the shock of World War II.

There is still peril in our shores today. I am thinking of the pariah countries my noble friend referred to earlier. I was the Minister in charge of the decontamination of Salisbury and I still remember, of course, the murder of Dawn Sturgess. I can honestly say that the people of Salisbury were very scared about what was happening in their city. The impact it had and what we had to do to rebuild were quite extraordinary.

We need to continue to press for peace and to support the institutions that were formed, but we also need to make sure that Parliament keeps them true to their mission, not the mission creep. In the alliances and conversations that happen in those institutions—the G7, and the G20, which the US hosts next year—it is important that we continue to make sure we search for peace, not appeasement, but also that we continue to respect, celebrate and commemorate, and avoid conflict in the future.

11.54 am

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab): My Lords, 80 years on, we all celebrate a glorious victory, and we perhaps forget that, had there not been a victory but a defeat, we would have been subject to an evil tyranny, and there would have been more Oradour-sur-Glanes on our own territory. That is one thing we must remember.

There were massive consequences in the world as a result of that victory. Two superpowers emerged. It led to the end of empire. For us in the UK, there were profound social changes, including the enhanced role of women, and also enhanced expectations of the role of government, which led, for example, to the National Health Service, to make a land fit for heroes.

I was born just before the outbreak of war. I have distant memories of the Blitz, the destruction of houses in front of my own house and a school just behind it, the Blitz in Swansea, which led to the obliteration of the city centre described so well by Dylan Thomas in “Return Journey”. I do not remember it but I was told I was taken to an Anderson shelter—no relation—and put in a little cot in the shelter, which later became our coal shed. I do remember the blackouts, barrage balloons, air raid sirens and, particularly, my little Mickey Mouse gas mask, which I treasured. I remember also learning to say, “Have you any gum, chum?” to the American soldiers who were billeted close to us. I remember the returning soldiers and, particularly, a friend of the family, Fred David, shinning the pole in front of Swansea Guildhall.

It had been a total war in terms of the number of countries, many already mentioned: not just those in the Caribbean, not just Ghana, but countries such as Norway, which included relatives of mine. We think first, of course, of the total national effort of our own service men and women, but I join my noble friend Lady Warwick in mentioning the role of women at that time. I recommend to your Lordships Chris Mayhew’s book, *One Family’s War*, in which his mother, a matriarch in Norfolk, asked all members of the family, as they set off to play their parts in the war, to send her a letter every week—not intended for publication. There is as an immediacy about it, and it sums up the spirit of the country very well.

Later, I joined in collecting for the Royal British Legion. I tried to help the Normandy Veterans Association—hence the casket in the Royal Gallery of sand from the Normandy invasion—and a forgotten service, the Merchant Navy Association, too easily forgotten, alas, but without whom we would not have survived.

I remember so many processions and parades, including a wonderfully diminutive Jewish lady in my city who carries, with great difficulty, the standard of the Jewish ex-servicemen. We bow before the memory of those wonderful people.

“At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them”.

There is a great kaleidoscope of memories. Young men in those sheepskin jackets racing to scramble; submariners and those shivering in the landing craft before setting sail for the Normandy beaches; those in the Arctic convoys to Murmansk; but also those, particularly women, who served on the home front in so many vital services.

The list is endless, but the story glorious. The memory is not just in wonderfully kept cemeteries or the glorious stories of heroism and sacrifice, but also in the togetherness of that time. We bow our heads in their memory. Yes, we shall remember them, but the

best way, surely, of remembering them, is to strive to promote those values for which they fought, and for which so many gave their lives.

11.59 am

Lord Bates (Con): The greatest generation, whose sacrifice and service we remember this week, not only secured for us a victory over tyranny but gave us the political and diplomatic tools and institutions that would avoid its repetition. The military victories won the war, but it is the often unnoticed diplomatic victories which have secured the peace.

When Britain stood alone and London was being pounded in the Blitz, this city was home to nine Governments in exile. On 12 June 1941, they joined together with representatives of Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa as the London International Assembly at St James's Palace to declare that

"the only true basis of enduring peace is the willing co-operation of free peoples in a world ... relieved of the menace of aggression".

This declaration was developed further two months later in a meeting between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in Newfoundland when they signed the Atlantic Charter, which would later be signed by 26 other nations. Over the next two years this was developed further, and the foundations of the United Nations began to take shape, culminating in the Washington Conversations on International Peace and Security Organization at Dumbarton Oaks, with much of the preparatory work carried out here in Westminster in Church House.

This was about not just institutions and charters but mechanisms for resolving disputes between nations by law, not war, and holding those who commit war crimes to account. On 7 October 1942, the then Lord Chancellor, Lord Simon, spoke in your Lordships' House and announced the formation of the United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes. This led to the London agreement and charter, signed on 8 August 1945 at Church House, which helped to establish the principles of international law and created the first international criminal court at Nuremberg.

Given this pivotal role in the foundation of the United Nations, it was agreed that the ideal venue for the first meetings of both the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council would be London, and they took place in January 1946. On the eve of the General Assembly, His Majesty King George VI hosted delegates from 51 countries at a banquet in St James's Palace and said that, in the long course of history,

"no more important meeting has ... taken place"

in this city. He was right. The venues for the General Assembly and the Security Council had been chosen personally by the then Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. He chose Methodist Central Hall for the General Assembly and Church House for the Security Council because, in his words, he wanted venues that had been "bathed in prayer".

The remarkable role of this great city and this great country in shaping the post-war political, diplomatic and legal order is something which is worth celebrating, because when politicians, diplomats and institutions

do their job, we spare our courageous Armed Forces the enormous cost of doing theirs. But these institutions cannot exist only on paper; they must act in practice. No one nation, no matter how great, can do it alone, and no nation, no matter how small, can stand aside from its responsibility. Yet, those institutions also established a world in which rights and responsibilities were no longer vested solely in sovereign states but in individual human beings and in all human beings.

Will the Minister therefore consider inviting the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council to return to London in January 2026 to mark the 80th anniversary of this great diplomatic victory, so that we can collectively rededicate ourselves to the vision of the United Nations charter, which speaks so profoundly to the world of today when it says:

"WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small ... AND FOR THESE ENDS to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security"?

When we honour those words, we honour their memory.

12.04 pm

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, this is clearly a day for memories: the memories that came to those of us who were around on VE Day. I was 12 years old, and I remember celebrating in the streets of Manchester, in Piccadilly. I am bound to say, had I been a bit older, I would have enjoyed the day even more—I was 12; I was innocent. This debate gives us a chance to reflect on some of the issues of the war and subsequently.

As a refugee who arrived in London at the end of June 1939, one of my first memories, having left Nazi-occupied Prague, with German soldiers everywhere, was seeing the ATS women marching in Hyde Park. I do not know why that made such a big impact on me, but I thought, "Well, Britain has women in the Army; there's something going for Britain". It really impressed me, and it is one of those things in my background.

Then, of course, I remember the barrage balloons and the ration books, which have already been mentioned. I remember that, in 1942, every child in the school I went to got three oranges. I had not seen oranges for three years, and it was quite a thing to have them. Going back a bit, I remember listening to Chamberlain indicating that we were at war with Germany. I suppose I had learned enough English by then to understand what he was saying. Of course, I remember the election campaign of 1945 but, given the broad consensus in this House, I do not want to reflect too much on that particular election campaign, although I think I knew, from the posters that were up in Manchester, the name of every Labour candidate in the various constituencies in Manchester. I think most of them won, but I must not go down that path too far.

In a more serious vein, we began to hear the shocking stories of what happened when some of the concentration camps were liberated, when the British Army went to Belsen. We heard about the horrors of the people in the camps and what had happened to them—some of

[LORD DUBS]

them walking corpses—and the piles of the dead. The shock it must have been to the British Army when they liberated Belsen and the other camps; I am sure some of them were traumatised for life by what they saw on that occasion.

In more recent years, I visited the beaches of Normandy. I also visited, with the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the battlefields of the Somme. We went to Ypres, and the Irish wanted to see what happened to the many Irish who had fought in the British Army in 1914-18 and, indeed, in the more recent war. There was also the contribution by the Commonwealth, which has been referred to, and, of course, there were the Poles, the Czechs and the French. All of them fought with us in the war, helping to win it.

The question is: have we learned the lessons? That, I suppose, is a sombre thought. We still have antisemitism, not just here but across Europe. We have Islamophobia. We see a dreadful conflict in Ukraine, with encouragement from some countries that we should appease the Russians—never must we do that. Then we have the tragedy in Israel on 7 October, the tragedy of what is happening in Gaza at the moment, and the increasing conflict in India and Pakistan, with two nuclear powers facing each other in a position of conflict. Looking back upon VE Day, I do not think we have done all that well as a continent. We could have done a lot better. In some ways, we have let down the people who fought and gave their lives for a better future than we are seeing at the moment.

I will briefly make two other points. One has not been mentioned before. We should pay tribute to the way the Germans have come to terms with their past. It must have been a horrible thing for them when they realised, during the war and subsequently, just what was happening. I have met the German ambassador to London at various events commemorating the Holocaust and I think Germany deserves credit for having come to terms with the most horrible past. On the whole, it has done it pretty well. I was invited to Berlin about a year and a half ago. There was a commemoration of the Kindertransport and the Holocaust, and I thought, “Really, this country is doing well in dealing with such a difficult past”.

Finally, I think this is a fantastic country, even though some of us criticise and have been critical of what is going on. It is thanks to the people who fought in the war that it is still a free country that is not under Nazi oppression. I give my thanks to the people of Britain for giving me safety.

12.10 pm

Baroness Meyer (Con): My Lords, it is very humbling to speak after 20 such excellent speeches, of course including the maiden speech by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough. I shall centre my remarks on VJ day, a victory that is further from the minds and memory of many in Britain. Comparatively little has been said about the war against Japan, yet it was arguably even more brutal, contributing to more than 30 million deaths.

It is not just the numbers: it is the method of warfare. The torture and cruelty inflicted by the Imperial Japanese Army were among the most sadistic in modern history. The experiences of those who endured those atrocities were so horrific that many, like my father, never spoke of them. My father survived only because of the atomic bomb, as awful as it is. He never spoke of his experiences, except once briefly on a chairlift in the mountains. The conversation lasted no more than 10 minutes. In that short time, I glimpsed the horror, sadistic beatings, disease, medical experiments, malnutrition and inhuman conditions. He kept his mind alive only by teaching French to a fellow prisoner, who in turn taught him Russian. He was one of the lucky ones and was released after seven months. He weighed 46 kilos. He was convinced that, had the war lasted any longer, he would not have survived. Yet these stories remain largely untold.

The memories differ vastly between nations. Germany has confronted its past through Auschwitz memorials and public remembrance. Japan’s memories tend to centre primarily on Hiroshima. Its memorials honour the dead, but not the crimes. Perhaps this reflects the deeper cultural divide between western guilt culture, rooted in Christianity, and Japan’s reverence for its emperor. In Germany, Hitler was viewed as a monstrous aberration; in Japan, the emperor was worshipped. Japan did not issue an explicit apology until 1992. The silence around Japan’s war crimes was sealed over, with experiences left unspoken and often unresolved.

That silence came at a cost. For my father and many like him it meant a life marked by trauma never healed. He died at the age of 97 in 2009. I knew very little about what he had endured. Once a lively, outgoing and sportive man, as photographs testify, the father I knew was quiet, solitary and often unwell. The toll of what he had endured was written into his body and his soul. Apart from that conversation, he never spoke of his experiences, but the images I retain from that brief exchange told me all I could ever need to know.

Like most Allied prisoners of war held in Japanese camps, he received no mental health support. Post-traumatic stress was neither recognised nor discussed. Seeking help, especially for a man raised by the Jesuits, was seen as weakness, so he, like many others, carried his burden in silence. He never complained, he simply carried on. My father received several distinguished decorations for his war service and bravery. I discovered his medals tucked in a drawer only after his death. He never sought recognition.

His quiet resilience and that of his fellow prisoners reminds us of a different kind of endurance, forged in unimaginable hardship. Their generation bore suffering with remarkable dignity. Were my father here today, he would tell us that we need to spend more on defence. How often when I was a child did he tell me that all the signs were there in 1936, but no one wanted to believe that war was about to happen again. So will the Minister say what steps this Government are going to take to ensure that future generations understand the lesser-known sacrifice made by those who fought and suffered in the Far East, so that no child forgets what our parents and grandparents went through?

12.15 pm

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow so many excellent, wide-ranging speeches, and particularly to follow the moving contribution from the noble Baroness, Lady Meyer. I, too, add my thanks to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough for her thoughtful maiden speech. I, like others, am looking forward to hearing more from her in the future.

On VE day, Eisenhower and Montgomery allowed a number of senior military, including my grandfather, an air marshal responsible for Second Tactical Air Group under Eisenhower, to come back from Germany to London to participate, just for one day—so I know he was here in London celebrating, which, I have to say, is more than my grandmother knew. I know because there is a biography of my grandfather. I also know that, on that particular day, our family were marking an empty chair in the room: joy tinged with much sadness. However, it is important not to see this as marking just a single day. We cannot and must not ignore what came before, what came after and, indeed, what threatens us now. We live in a historic continuum that we must learn from, or we are in danger of repeating the mistakes and errors that lead too easily to war.

Today, I am wearing the Royal Flying Corps brooch given to my grandmother, Nan, by my grandfather, that same Air Marshal, Sir Arthur Coningham, but always known as “Mary” from 1916 onwards, a distortion of “Maori”, because he grew up in New Zealand. He, aged 16, left school in 1911 and worked on a sheep station until war started. He joined the Anzac 5th (Wellington Rifles) Regiment on 10 August and was in Western Samoa before the end of August. Gallipoli followed, which he was lucky to survive, and then he headed to England to join the RFC in 1916.

A distinguished aviator, he learned over the trenches in the First World War the importance of land-air interaction. His theory of tactical air was first fully deployed at El Alamein when, as an air marshal, he worked for Air Chief Marshal Tedder, but he learned his craft in World War One and in his service in the Middle East between the wars. He had only two brief spells back in England in the entirety of that period. His land-air tactical principles are still used today. In fact, in the USA military they are known as “Coningham’s Keys”, the keys to victory. He used them in Italy after D-Day and all the way up to 7 May 1945.

I think he would have been particularly proud that one of his descendants, who today specialises in this area, works in our military. His brother Vincent was blown up guarding Belfast docks and very severely injured. After some years, he was able to return to the law and became a noted KC in Australia. His stepson, Lieutenant Howard Frank, was with the Grenadier Guards en route to Market Garden and died on 10 September 1944. My mum, then aged 10, was traumatised by the death of her beloved brother, and it affected her mental health for the rest of her life. The noble Baroness, Lady Meyer, said that there was no mental health support available for veterans. Nor was there for the public, either. As children, we lived and relived her horror of commemoration and the consequences of his death.

I spoke about a continuum. Those of us with relatives in military service, with frequent deployments and threats today, feel much, I think, as my grandfather’s family felt throughout the first half of the 20th century.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, talked about deterrence and how we must always call out authoritarian behaviour. Martin Niemöller—he of “First they came for the communists”—which, by the way, the Americans changed to “the socialists”, completely missing the point that it is the people you do not like who you should speak up for—was key after the war, not just with the German community; he went around the world teaching people how to learn to speak up.

Many other organisations founded as a result of the Second World War have been mentioned, but I have not heard anyone mention the Council of Europe. Churchill founded it, with its European Court of Human Rights. It is one of the most important checks and balances to ensure that individual freedoms are protected. Despite differences about individual definitions of human rights, if we do not have the ability to call out other nations, we will not listen and learn.

I shall end by quoting briefly Edward Blunden’s mourning poem, “V Day”:

“And all their actions rise to future fame;
Be theirs sweet peace, dear love, kind rain and sun.
The life for which they marched and sailed and flew,
Reunion, restoration, freedom, deep and true”.

Today that freedom is at risk. Those who gave their all in the 20th century would be horrified if we were to lose that freedom again.

12.22 pm

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Lab): My Lords, it is a privilege and an honour to take part in today’s debate with the opportunity that it provides to discuss the impact that war has on families—my family in particular—and the human cost of conflict. Many of my comments will already have been echoed around the Chamber.

Most of us have a family wartime archive. Mine comprises bundles of personal and official wartime letters, ration books, clothing coupons, a cap badge and, puzzlingly, an engagement ring. The deeply patriotic Bassams believed in the war and its aims. My grandfather was a Primitive Methodist lay preacher based in Whitby. At the war’s outset, he and his wife Lizzie were part of a Methodist befriending group set up to support servicemen training away from home. Lizzie and John Bassam had three children: Ella, Enid—my mother—and Firmin. Ella died from measles aged two, but Enid was the first to join a national service, the Land Army, and later the National Fire Service. She trained as an auxiliary to male firefighters. She told me that her female colleagues could tackle fires as well as any man—better, in fact, because they were younger and fitter.

Enid’s brother Firmin Bassam joined the Seaforth Highlanders in 1941. With the 51st (Highland) Division, he saw action in the Middle East, north Africa, Sicily, Italy and finally north-west Europe. An obituary for Firmin Bassam in the Methodist magazine *The Dawn*, which circulated in Whitby, said:

[LORD BASSAM OF BRIGHTON]

“For the past three years Private Bassam has been in the thick of the fighting. First at El Alamein until the Axis Forces surrendered, he was wounded, but making a quick recovery in a military hospital in Egypt he took part in the invasion of Sicily where he was again wounded. He rejoined his unit in Italy, and when wounded again contracted malaria, which resulted in his return to England. After recovering he received orders to rejoin his unit and was with the British Forces which first landed in Normandy on D-Day on 6th June”.

Firmin’s CO, Captain Ferguson, wrote describing his tragic death. He was struck by a hand grenade when digging a slit trench on 26 July. His bravery and commitment left his comrades distraught. He had fought in the toughest theatres of war, was wounded many times and survived fighting his way off the Normandy beaches. Firmin Bassam saw service not as heroic but as necessary to see off the evils of Nazism. His letters home are telling. In one to his sister, he described the training for D-Day:

“The other day we had a scheme and were told we were the best troops, actually we were no good, we had to sleep out for three days in trenches full of water without food or tea and during that time marched a distance of over 70 miles”.

His platoon was reserved for special tasks but he worried that “their nerves are gone”. He confided that he was planning his next leave with Roselle, his new girlfriend, whom he wanted to marry. His Christmas 1943 letter tells the family that he is being kept in hospital to fully recover, and that the French invasion may start before his leave. His last letter, written two days before he was killed, says he cannot disclose where he is except that he is always in the front line. He ends:

“Hope you are keeping OK. I am not too bad. Please give my best wishes to all who may be asking for me. For now, I say cheerio and may the Lord God Almighty be with you at all times”.

Firmin’s death devastated his family but they were immensely proud. I have a family photo of Enid standing next to him, both proudly wearing their uniforms, his arm around her shoulder as they gaze into the camera with discreet and modest smiles. Enid passed away in 1994 aged 80; her brother was just 21 when he died. She said he was funny, talented, loyal and caring, and all her life she wondered about what could have been. Firmin signed off one letter with the following:

“So remember the brave lads who fell by the way when final victory is won. Remember the price they had to pay in defeating the tyrant’s plan”—

not a bad epitaph from a fallen soldier who simply believed in doing what was right.

Wars focus on generals and leaders, but today, rightly, we remember troopers such as Private Firmin Bassam and Firewoman Enid Bassam, who gave so much. My hope for this week’s commemorations is that we do not only dwell on the victories but think more about the sense of peace, unity and harmony that ending war can bring, and try to use the occasion to heal divisions that some in our country simply cannot wait to perpetually reopen.

12.27 pm

Lord Ricketts (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as the founding chairman of the British Normandy

Memorial. I congratulate the Minister on his powerful opening and the right reverend Prelate on her excellent maiden speech.

A lot of this week has been about celebrating VE Day but, as the noble Baronesses, Lady Hunter and Lady Meyer, have powerfully said, we should not forget those who fought and served in the Far East, including my father, who was in the Fourteenth Army in Burma. They called themselves the Forgotten Army but it is right that they are not forgotten today. We should also remember that for millions of people in eastern Europe, 8 or 9 May was a day when they swapped one totalitarian occupation for another, and it was another 45 years before they had their liberation day.

As we have heard in today’s debate, celebration has to go hand in hand with the commemoration of those whose sacrifices made victory possible. I want to reflect briefly on the trends in commemoration, on the strength of the experience of designing, building and running the British Normandy Memorial. This was the first major UK national memorial overseas for several decades. The tradition in this country is that we commemorate here at a national commemoration monument, at the Cenotaph or the Unknown Warrior, while overseas the focus for commemoration is in the intensely moving Commonwealth war graves cemeteries. But the initiative for a national memorial in Normandy came from a group of veterans. They wanted all the comrades who fell in the 1944 battle to be remembered in one place, as is the case with the American and Canadian memorials.

With generous help from the Government and many donations from the public, we built what I think I can say is a fine memorial overlooking Gold Beach, which opened to the public in 2021. We benefited a lot from the contribution of other noble Lords: the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, who has now taken over from me as chairman, and the noble Lords, Lord Janvrin, Lord Soames and Lord Kakkar, who are also trustees of the Spirit of Normandy Trust. We were enormously honoured when the King and Queen, with President and Madame Macron, presided at the official opening on 6 June last year, and it was moving to hear His Majesty refer to his visit to Normandy in the speech he gave at the VE Day concert last night.

One advantage of a national memorial is that it can be inclusive, telling the story of not just a single engagement but an entire military campaign, in our case from 6 June to 31 August 1944. Our memorial commemorates all those who fell under British command, of many nationalities, and includes those in the merchant marine—22,440 men and two women from the Queen Alexandra’s nursing service. One name, indeed, who figures among them, having been killed on 6 June, is Sergeant Vernon Coaker.

The memorial is inclusive in another sense as well. We built a separate memorial on the site to the many thousands of French civilians who were killed in that summer of 1944. Over the last 80 years, the citizens of Normandy have welcomed back the veterans, calling them “our liberators”, and it is only right that the suffering of their forebears should also be remembered.

My second trend is that commemoration needs to be more digital if it is to transmit successfully to the next generation the memory of what happened and

why. We invested in a state-of-the-art app so that our roll of honour can be searched. Many families have generously donated photographs, letters home and journals, all of which are now available online. I, like other noble Lords, am convinced that telling the human stories behind the names graven in stone on memorials is the best way to keep interest alive in those momentous events. Our trust has recently completed the Winston Churchill education centre and is focusing on programmes for schoolchildren.

My last trend is the constant need to be creative. These VE Day celebrations have shown the power of creativity. For the second summer, we are delighted to welcome at the British memorial the haunting life-size silhouettes of service men and women created by the charity Standing with Giants. It has installed 1,475 figures at our memorial—that is the number of those killed under British command on D-Day alone—and it is an extraordinarily moving installation. It has proved immensely popular, with 250,000 visitors to the memorial last year, and I pay tribute to Dan and Janette Barton, who founded the charity and whose inspirational work has been very powerful in many other places as well.

If we can be inclusive, digital and creative, we can ensure that the courage and sacrifice of those who fought for our freedom, including the many referred to in this debate, will never be forgotten.

12.32 pm

The Lord Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham: My Lords, it is a privilege to speak in this debate. I congratulate my right reverend friend the Bishop of Peterborough on her excellent maiden speech, and I look forward to her insightful and wide-ranging contribution to the work of this House in the coming days, particularly drawing on her experience in education and with young people. I also thank the Minister for his very moving and impassioned speech opening this debate.

We commemorate a time of extraordinary sacrifice and service in the story of our nation, as well as our allied partners, notably in the Commonwealth. Victory, we know, was hard won. I pay particular tribute to the vital work of the Armed Forces chaplains, who served with great distinction throughout the war. We can be thankful that they remain an essential and fully integrated part of our military capability, not only because of their vital role in times of conflict but for the well-being of all service personnel during training, on exercise and on deployment in strategic peacetime operations.

In my diocese, among the Armed Forces I pay tribute to the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, one of the four armoured regiments tasked to lead the British assault landings on the Normandy beaches on D-Day. They remained in action for 50 of the 60 days it took to win the Normandy campaign. Through France, Belgium and Holland, and eventually into Germany, they were used to provide the armoured push that led infantry attacks.

Yet the casualties of war included many lives also lost in our cities, which bravely withstood the relentless bombing raids early in the war, as the noble Baroness, Lady Coffey, expressed so movingly. During overnight raids in Nottingham 84 years ago today, 159 people were killed and many hundreds were injured. There

almost certainly would have been far more casualties if the city had not also been the first to deploy a detailed ARP plan, which many other cities would soon follow. While our cities would of course be rebuilt, the trauma and loss that many people experienced remained a painful shadow over their lives.

It is sobering that our celebrations this week take place against the backdrop of a tense and uncertain time of global instability and conflict. It is necessary and urgent that we rebuild our military capability as an essential deterrent to avoid future conflicts, as a number of noble Lords, particularly the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, have expressed so clearly. Alongside this, we must also retain and enhance our investment in peacekeeping resources, such as the training of skilled mediators, and in post-conflict stabilisation. As Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers”. We can join with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in being thankful and praying for the newly elected Pope Leo XIV, who I am sure will be an inspiration to all Christian people and people of other faiths in being truly lion-hearted bridge builders in our broken and divided world.

Our military capacity is, on one level, much reduced from what it was in the past, but that is no reason to limit our ambitions and our potential to make a difference, especially if we draw on our strengths in technology, creativity and diplomacy. We need to nurture the aspirations of a rising generation to have a compassionate worldview, a view that is not at odds with loyalty to our nation and where deep convictions and wide sympathies are not in conflict. I wonder whether this might somewhat be diminished if we are also closing off the opportunities for young people to experience the wider world at first hand. I therefore ask His Majesty’s Government to consider how we can further incentivise our universities and colleges to maintain and enhance the opportunities for international exchange study, perhaps also reconsidering how we might re-engage with the Erasmus programme, which provides vital opportunities for young people to have their own personal insight into our wider world.

We need to deepen our listening and understanding, not to compel agreement or to undermine distinctive beliefs and heritage that each may hold with confidence but in order that we may stand together in contending for the value of our common humanity and the unique dignity, worth and freedom of every individual, which the sacrifices of the Second World War did so much to ensure for generations to come.

12.37 pm

Lord Lemos (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her maiden speech. I share many of her interests and concerns, so I look forward to working with her. I am honoured to be the chair of English Heritage, in which I obviously declare my interest. English Heritage takes pride in looking after the Cenotaph in Whitehall and many other war memorials on behalf of the nation. English Heritage’s job is not just to look after places and buildings; we are also stewards of our national memory, what we as a nation choose to remember and what we cannot forget.

[LORD LEMOS]

All this week the Cenotaph has been draped in the union flag to celebrate VE Day. Last night, on VE Day, Dover Castle was lit up in red, white and blue, visible on a clear night from France. In 1940, long before VE Day could ever be anticipated, the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk was planned from the bomb-proof tunnels built beneath the cliffs at Dover. Years later, in 1944, Operation Fortitude was also planned from the tunnels at Dover Castle. This was the deception strategy to convince the Nazis, erroneously, that the allied landing would take place at Pas-de-Calais, when in fact the troops were going to land in Normandy. We cannot imagine what those naval officers were thinking throughout the war, but courage and commitment would have been uppermost in their minds.

Not far from your Lordships' House is the Belgian gratitude memorial on Victoria Embankment, created to thank the British people for sheltering thousands of Belgian refugees during the First World War. Gratitude and thanksgiving resonate powerfully on VE Day. The bodies of the soldiers who died in the First World War never came home; they fought and fell on a foreign field. Many were buried anonymously, and their loved ones had no graves to mourn them at home.

The first Cenotaph in Whitehall was unveiled for London peace celebrations on 18 July 1919. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, it was a temporary structure of wood and painted canvas built in 11 days for parading troops to salute their fallen comrades and celebrate victory. The Cenotaph made a deep and immediate impression on the public. Within the week, the Cenotaph had been visited by more than 1.25 million people and was 10 feet deep in flowers and wreaths. The *Times* commented:

“The Cenotaph is only a temporary structure made to look like stone, but Sir Edwin Lutyens' design is so grave, severe and beautiful that one might well wish it were indeed of stone and permanent”.

It was soon decided that the Cenotaph should be rebuilt as a permanent memorial in Portland stone. The enduring Cenotaph was unveiled by King George V at 11 am on 11 November 1920—the second anniversary of the Armistice. In the same ceremony, the remains of an anonymous British soldier exhumed from a war cemetery in France were interred at Westminster Abbey to form the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

That sequence of events, now so little known, changed the way our nation remembers. The surge of public national mourning for the lost but not forgotten has meant that the Cenotaph has become the centrepiece of our national commitment to remembrance. The Cenotaph is a permanent monument to all those who died on the battlefield defending this great country, but it also has an unshakeable place in our shared national identity. If I can put it like this, the Cenotaph is the nation's commitment to the insistence of remembering.

On VE Day, we celebrate victory in the Second World War: our nation's finest hour. We commemorate the courage and commitment shown at Dover, throughout the country and in many countries to achieve that victory. We commemorate the profound, heartfelt gratitude of all those who were spared and saved. We commemorate

the insistence of remembering both the living and the dead. Memory is something we have, not something we have lost.

12.43 pm

Lord Shinkwin (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Lemos. I also congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her important maiden speech.

The noble Lord, Lord Anderson of Swansea, invited us to consider the possibility of a Nazi victory. He was surely right to do so, for it is when I reflect on the horror of what so easily might have been, but for the immense sacrifices of those who fought and died only 80 years ago so that future generations might be free, that I begin to appreciate the scale of the debt—the personal debt—which I owe them. The fact is that, like my childhood orthopaedic surgeon, a refugee from the Nazis who took refuge in Britain, we would both have been *Untermenschen*: he for being Jewish and I for being disabled. It is a sobering thought that, had the Nazis won, as they so nearly did, both of us would have been destined for death simply for the crime of being.

On a more positive note, quite apart from the tremendous technological and medical advances of the last 80 years, who could deny that society has changed for the better in so many ways as a result of the freedoms won for us then? Yes, it is still work in progress, but we are closer to equality of the sexes than we have ever been. Only three days ago, I had lunch with the senior partner of an international law firm. She is a formidable business leader. And it is remarkable that, in less than 100 years since truly equal suffrage was introduced, this country has already had three women Prime Ministers, the first just over 50 years after that long overdue change was made.

2025 is a year of milestones for equality. It marks 60 years since the first Race Relations Act, 30 years since the first Disability Discrimination Act and 12 years since the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act gained Royal Assent. All were important milestones for equality, and all were impossible without the victories we remember today.

Equality is a crucial value, which the wartime generation did not have the luxury of enjoying, so focused were they on survival. We know the world was such a different place then, when inequality was written into the fabric of society. But, just as they would not necessarily have recognised the relatively recent concept of equality, I do wonder whether all in our society today recognise or even accept the validity of the wartime generation's values, the values that so many of them, as we have heard in today's debate, fought and died for: of respect for life; of caring with compassion for those in vulnerable situations, whether through old age, disability or poverty; of respect for authority within the rule of law; of fairness and fair play, as the noble Baroness, Lady Amos, mentioned; and, crucially, as the Minister mentioned in his opening remarks, of patriotism, of belief in Britain.

I worry that some of the post-Cold War generations actually believe they are entitled to freedom; that payment for freedom does not have to be made in

blood; that the so-called peace dividend is permanent; and that the value of knowing right from wrong, good from evil, is an anachronism, so desensitised and compromised has our society become by the fluid relativism where anything goes.

In conclusion, for their sake and with abiding gratitude for the sacrifices of those who helped secure victory in Europe and victory in Japan, I hope I am wrong. But, unless we increase our defence spending, as other noble Lords have advocated, I fear that those generations in particular are about to relearn a brutal lesson from the likes of Putin and Xi Jinping which generations before them learnt 80-odd years ago from the Nazis: that the value of freedom is truly appreciated only when we are at greatest risk of losing it.

12.50 pm

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, the words of His Majesty the King, as reported in the news, focused on the words that we should not forget. It is a privilege to be part of a debate like this where so much has been remembered—such varied and rich memories indeed. I have searched in my mind for how to concentrate or focus on any of the memories that are mine.

My father served in the Royal Navy. He survived the war, but his marriage did not. I would like to remember all those relationships that were victims of the war, whereby lives had to be rebuilt afterwards. At the end of his life, my father's second family handed me some mementoes of his service, and I lay one in particular before noble Lords. He was a member of the crew of HMS "Duke of York", which ferried Winston Churchill across the Atlantic in December 1941 for the meeting with President Roosevelt. There were historic pictures, with Lord Beaverbrook, the King, Winston Churchill and other dignitaries, marking the special sense attached to this particular exercise.

I shall not dwell anymore on my father—it is far too painful—but I remember our neighbours, the Hartland family, who had television, where I was able to go and watch from time to time. Their father, Bert Hartland—these are the annals of the poor, and he will never be remembered anywhere, although now he will, because he is in *Hansard*—would break into uncontrollable fits of rage. He had been a prisoner of war at the hands of the Japanese and had returned a wreck. We all just lived with that; he did what he did, it would go as quickly as it came, but it was a reminder of things that we could only guess at.

Then further afield, I led a little election monitoring group in Eritrea, in 1993, at the moment when Eritrea came legitimately on to the world map. We were assigned duties of overseeing that election in Keren. It was an ordinary exercise with a small team who are now lifelong friends, but to my total surprise, I found two enormous graveyards. In 1942, a battle had been fought in Keren, and there is a huge graveyard for the thousands of Italians who died on that occasion and hundreds of allied troops in their own, separate cemetery—most of them, of course, members of the Indian Army, with Africans and British too, of course. It reminded me of another dimension and detail in the memories that we are sharing today.

By chance, my wife and I in 2005 found ourselves sitting in the Frauenkirche in Dresden, which had only a week before had its restoration programme completed. It was completely rebuilt after the carpet bombing of 1945, because 1945 marks the 80th anniversary of things other than the things that took our people on to the streets in front of Buckingham Palace—and that had to be remembered, too.

In my final memory, I was chair of the Hendon and Golders Green branch of the Council of Christians and Jews, which brought me into contact with another Leslie. When Leslies meet, there is joy in heaven. This particular Leslie was a very special one, because he was born and raised in Glynneath, about 20 miles from Burry Port, where I was born and raised—so we fell upon each other. In the end, he turned out to be an Orthodox rabbi, the senior Jewish chaplain in the forces that liberated Bergen-Belsen, which the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, referred to. I remember him talking to me about it. It is inconceivable. I will not add to what we have heard in bits and pieces ourselves already, except to give a quotation from an interview that he gave to the BBC which I shall never forget. He said that if all the trees in the world became pens, all the seas of the world became ink, and all the heavens became writing paper, they would not provide enough material on which to write the sufferings of the people that he met that day. That says it all, does it not?

Therefore, if your Lordships will indulge me very quickly, I do not settle for "Don't forget"; it is the flip side of a coin that reminds us to remember. "Remember", which is hyphenated etymologically, is re-membering what has been dis-membered. That is the task before us. From my conversations with my friend Leslie Hardman, I can only add that in Hebrew "zakar", which means "remember", contains not only the injunction to send one's mind back to a moment in history to recreate a situation that we lived through then, but, on the basis of that, to trigger action that sees that it will never happen again.

12.56 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, I am delighted to participate in this debate, which marks in particular the 80th anniversary of VE Day. My contribution is a deeply personal one, taking memories handed down from my mother, grandmother and other members of my family in Denmark.

Denmark was occupied from April 1940 until 5 May 1945, although the island of Bornholm remained under Russian occupation for another year. I am proud of the support given by Britain to the resistance efforts in Denmark in terms of explosives and ammunition and, of course, moral support.

It was always going to be difficult for a small country such as Denmark, with limited military forces, to resist the German occupation of its country. Initially, the Danes declared neutrality and agreed a treaty of non-aggression with Germany, primarily to protect the Jews—I am delighted to say that most of the Jews survived the war under the German occupation. Germany broke that treaty within one year.

With support from the Special Operations Executive here, the Danish resistance movement became more active and more daring, managing to damage the

[BARONESS McINTOSH OF PICKERING]

German occupiers with their efforts to sabotage and disrupt the occupying forces, as well as taking strike action to deny the German war effort ammunition and arms being produced in Danish factories destined for the German army.

A strict curfew was imposed and the hours were limited further as the war went on. Many Danes defied the curfew order to take an evening stroll, and were shot and killed on the streets. News of the liberation reached Denmark from the British Broadcasting Corporation, as the BBC was then known, which interrupted its normal broadcast on the evening of 4 May 1945.

British forces played a large role in freeing Denmark, as well as assisting the resistance fighters. During World War II, there were 415 airdrops, allied aircraft dropping 6,500 containers with weapons, ammunitions and sabotage equipment to support the Danish resistance movement. There were inevitably heavy losses, with 18 allied aircraft lost over Danish soil and 69 airmen losing their lives in the line of duty.

The liberation was followed by the prosecution of those who collaborated with German occupiers working against the resistance movement. Over 10,000 were tried as collaborators or traitors between 1947 and 1950. Over 100 were sentenced to death, with more than 40 executed.

The ninth of May is also Schuman Day, commemorating the role played by Robert Schuman and other European leaders in bringing Europe together after the war, initially pooling their coal and steel resources to prevent the potential for further aggression between European neighbours. Today marks the 75th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, marking the first steps in greater co-operation, peace and prosperity between European neighbours who had previously been at war with each other in the 20th century.

I consider myself a product of a very special European union between a Scottish father and a Danish mother, who met on a blind date in Hamburg in the aftermath of the Second World War. My father was serving as a Royal Army Medical Corps officer, and my mother was working as a translator with the British Army. The UK having now left the umbrella of the European Union, I hope that a review next year of our relations with the EU will be positive and reflective of the realities in which we now live. Perhaps the European defence mechanism outlined by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, could be the next step forward to which Britain can contribute.

Until now, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, my generation had lived in relative peace. We owe that peace and our freedom to all who sacrificed their lives in the Second World War, and we recognise and commemorate all who served and contributed to that success in Europe and the Far East.

1.01 pm

Lord Parekh (Lab): My Lords, as we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, it is important to remember what it actually signifies. Every act of memorialisation or celebration is also a re-enactment. In remembering those who died, we

should also remember their sacrifices and commit ourselves to a world in which such sacrifices will no longer be necessary. We do not celebrate or memorialise the past for its own sake; we do that in order to learn lessons, and for inspiration. I very much hope that we will do so in this context, given the violence and injustice we see all over the world.

The Second World War was one of the most vicious wars, far more so than the First World War, with far more casualties, military and civilian. Different countries played different roles, and the important thing is, how was that role interpreted? There, I think we made a serious mistake, to which I want to alert your Lordships—not that this is something new, but it is an important point to bear in mind. People began to interpret the Second World War as a war in which the Americans played the crucial role: they were Europe's saviours, and they helped us win the war. This is just not true.

The Americans did supply us with weapons and soldiers, but the major role was played by the Soviet Union, which sacrificed the largest number of people—27 million. Of the 15 republics which constituted the Soviet Union, the Russian Republic suffered 87,000 casualties. In short, the Soviet Union played a decisive military role.

After the war, I would have expected us to organise things in such a way that the Soviet role was integrated into the Atlantic Charter and the role that we assigned to a new world body. We did not do that, and we ended up creating the bipolar world in which we were the West, and on the other side were the Soviets. That was a serious mistake, and if we are not careful, we are in danger of doing something similar, because the bipolar world we created is crumbling in front of us. What will we replace it with? A multipolar world? For that world, again, we do not quite know how to get our bearings. This was one mistake, one failing, of the treaty that ended the Second World War.

The other issue that is quite important—and I say this as an Indian—is how India and the role of the Commonwealth were grossly underestimated in the course of the Second World War. India contributed a very large number of people and large amount of money, in lots of ways. Some were voluntary recruits; others had to be compelled. Whatever the reason and whatever the cause, a large number of people were assembled. What did we do to remember their role in the Second World War? Nothing. It is not that we wanted to show any kind of discrimination; it is simply that we forgot—partly because we were in the business of reconstructing the world and partly because we were remembering our own past—what the Indians and others had contributed. It never occurred to us. But the fact remains that we did not play fair by them. For their part, they were caught up in a world that was destroyed by the partition and the enormous amount of bloodshed it caused. Therefore, they could not press for it and we did not think of it, and the result was that, for years and years, India's and the Commonwealth's role went unrecognised.

There was another way in which it went unrecognised. The Second World War was supposed to be about giving freedom and fostering democracy. Mahatma Gandhi asked that, before India joins the war, the

British should make a commitment to give India independence—would Britain do that? Britain hesitated, and no such commitment was made, with the result that the Indian contribution to the Second World War was far less than it could have been and far more half-hearted.

I end by saying that, if one analyses the Second World War and its consequences objectively and dispassionately and asks oneself what the lessons are to learn from it—not just immediate but long term—one sees that they are only just being learned.

1.06 pm

Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green (CB): My Lords, it is a genuine honour and privilege to speak today because, as the noble Lord, Lord Shinkwin, referred to, had Hitler won I doubt very much that I would be here. Over the last five years up until the end of March this year, I have worked with different parts of our Armed Forces and the Royal British Legion on matters relating to leadership and culture. As someone who is in the employ of these organisations and as a former reservist, and perhaps overly cautious about the code of conduct—one never wants to be told off by the noble Baroness, Lady Manningham-Buller—I have avoided speaking on matters relating to the military. But, as my financial interest has now ended, I feel able to speak more freely about the extraordinary institutions that strive to keep us safe. I hope that is acceptable.

I want to take a moment to note my debt of gratitude to Lord Etherton for his work on behalf of LGBT veterans, among his many other achievements. I express my profound condolences to his husband Andrew and family. Lord Etherton will be missed.

Like others, I acknowledge the role that my grandparents and great-grandparents played in the wars. My great-grandmother, Marion Lauder, was one of the first women to drive an ambulance in the First World War and was a suffragette. Her daughter, Betty Martin—my maternal grandmother—was a Wren. My maternal grandfather, Joseph Martin, served in Normandy. He returned, having been shot, and limped all his life. My paternal grandfather, William Hunt, worked the docks in Barry, south Wales. As the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick of Undercliffe, has described, that was not a particularly easy role to play in the war. The resilience and commitment shown by my family and countless others to something greater than themselves revealed extraordinary sacrifice, and it is because of their service that our democracy continues to hold.

As has been referred to, we continue to face threats. Perhaps the world has always been volatile and uncertain, but multiple wars on multiple fronts, requiring multiple responses, feels particularly challenging. In many ways, warfare has not changed. In Ukraine, soldiers are still digging trenches, but, at the same time, our Armed Forces and allies must grapple with cyber threats—threats that are increasing at an exponential rate and evolving and mutating far faster than the Enigma code did. There has perhaps always been an imbalance between requirements and the resources available, but the demands we place on our Armed Forces feel greater than ever.

I was struck by the comments from computer scientists this week who suggested that the Enigma code would now be cracked by AI in 13 minutes, although, of course, in 13 minutes multiple Enigma codes could also be created. This led me to recall a letter sent by four Government Code and Cypher School cryptanalysts, including Alan Turing, to Sir Winston Churchill in 1941. The extraordinary letter, held by the National Archives, is fascinating. In it, the four authors explain that they needed more staff. Women would be fine: 20 women, to be exact, in the way that cryptologists are known to be, would be perfect if they were to crack the Enigma code. Sir Winston Churchill wrote on their letter:

“Make sure they have all they want on extreme priority and report to me that this has been done”.

Over the past 80 years, I suspect that generations of military leaders have made, if not exactly the same, a variation on this ask: more women, more huts, more money. We need more, if we are to do more. I am sure most have craved a handwritten instruction from a Prime Minister to make sure that they have all they want. The constant imbalance between resources, capability and commitment is not new, and I hope the strategic defence review, due in the summer, will provide our Armed Forces with more long-term certainty—beyond parliamentary terms—about resource, clarity about the trade-offs we would like them to make in utilising that resource, and the consequences of those trade-offs for the UK. We must never forget the sacrifices that were made 80 years ago, and we must do all in our power to support our Armed Forces today to do what we ask them to do: to protect our democracy and keep the peace. I hope that is possible.

1.11 pm

Baroness Harris of Richmond (LD) [V]: My Lords, I, too, thank the Minister for his inspiring opening of this debate, which has included the excellent maiden speech by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough. There have been many remarkable speeches today. In May 1944, I was six months old. I remember absolutely nothing of that momentous day, but the aftermath of that terrible war was imprinted on my memory a few short months later when I was reintroduced to my father, who had been away on war duty from soon after I was born. I remember clearly his moustache and glasses, and I howled when this large stranger in a scratchy brown uniform picked me up.

We did not fight that dreadful war alone, and we should never forget the significant contribution of the countries of the then Empire, now the Commonwealth, that fought alongside Great Britain from September 1939, when we stood alone, well before the arrival of the USSR in mid-1941 and the USA in late 1941. While 6 million men and women served in the Armed Forces of Great Britain, another 5 million, mostly volunteers, came from Australia, which lost more than 39,000 personnel; Canada, which lost 42,000; India, which formed the largest volunteer army in the world of some 2.5 million and which lost 87,000 fighting in places such as Burma, Italy and north Africa; New Zealand, which lost more than 11,000; South Africa, which lost 11,900; and the colonies of west and east Africa, as well as Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, which lost many thousands too, as we have already heard.

[BARONESS HARRIS OF RICHMOND]

These countries and others—11 million people serving under the same union flag—provided soldiers, sailors and air personnel who fought all the King's enemies: the Germans, Italians, Japanese and the Vichy French forces. Included in that number who were helping were people from Jamaica, Malta, Cyprus, Poland, Norway and Denmark, and Gurkhas from Nepal, 132,000 of them, 2,734 of whom were awarded bravery decorations. I am delighted to say that the Gurkhas still serve the Crown in Catterick camp, near where I live, to this day. In all, some 15 million soldiers and auxiliaries served in World War II.

I also want to tell your Lordships about the RAF Regiment, of which I have the honour of being called a companion. I am indebted to its historian, Dr Nigel Warwick, for his help in providing me with the history of the corps around World War II. Our airfields were continuously under attack. In early May 1945, nine regiment task groups passed through the Army's forward positions and moved into Schleswig-Holstein to occupy airfields up to the Danish border, 15 airfields being seized and the regiment taking the surrender of 50,000 German troops and numerous senior commanders. By VE Day, 74 RAF Regiment squadrons were in north-west Europe, deployed on airfields throughout the British-occupied zone. They were in Germany, Denmark and Norway, taking the surrender of many thousands of Luftwaffe personnel. They were also located across the globe.

In Burma, RAF Regiment squadrons had moved forward with General Slim's victorious Fourteenth Army in the advance to Rangoon, winning its greatest battle, for the defence of Meiktila airfield, the capture of which was the masterstroke of the campaign. As a force that had risen to 85,000 airmen in 1942, it had been continually depleted by manpower demands from the Army, but the RAF Regiment had fought in all the major campaigns of the war and by 1945 had become a crucial component of the Royal Air Force, thus ensuring the regiment's continuing existence. It protects the Royal Air Force and its aircraft and personnel to the present day—long may it continue to do so.

We salute all the veterans who came through that terrible war, all the millions of civilians who helped in fields, in factories, in whatever way they could to help the war effort. Today, we face the possibility of further war, and we must prepare for it. However, one thing is certain. It will be a very different battle from the one fought in World War II. Will we ever learn the lessons of what makes a sustainable peace?

1.18 pm

Baroness Rafferty (Lab): My Lords, it is an honour to speak on this important day and to follow the remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Harris of Richmond, who has already praised the many brilliant stories and speeches that we have heard today. I add my congratulations to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on an excellent maiden speech.

My mother, Bridget, trained as a nurse in the late 1930s and throughout the war. Her final assignment was nursing prisoners of war in the military hospital at Bridge of Earn in Perthshire in 1944. I recall her

talking of the horrific, maggot-infested wounds of the German prisoners of war and their shattered physical condition, and her saying, "They were so young". One story that has stuck with me was an instance in which the rules of non-engagement were broken at Christmas. A group of carol singers were touring the wards in a candlelit procession to cheer and comfort patients and staff. They were forbidden to enter the enemy wards, but when they stopped outside the German ward, the doors were flung open and silence gave way to song, as the soldiers joined in the chorus of "Silent Night"—"Stille Nacht".

My father, Michael Rafferty, served in the Merchant Navy on the convoy ships, so crucial to maintaining supplies, communication cables and support for other services. I had the privilege of seeing the remnants of his ship, the "Port Chalmers", in the war museum in Malta during a recent visit. The ship was part of Operation Pedestal, which set sail to save Malta from surrender, one of over 14 convoy ships supported by two battleships, three aircraft carriers, 32 destroyers and seven submarines. It was the largest convoy expedition and escort to date and, according to naval historians, it was also the most dangerous to that point in the war.

Malta was strategically pivotal to the control of the Mediterranean and Suez Canal. The convoy was pounded by enemy fire—mines and air—along the way. The "Port Chalmers" played a key role, as it was the convoy's flagship as well as carrying critical supplies to beleaguered Malta. It was the first to reach Valletta harbour, while other ships sustained severe damage or were sunk. It arrived relatively unscathed to cheering crowds. The mortality rate for merchant seamen was higher than for all other services. My father never spoke about his experience, but it is hard to imagine just how terrifying it must have felt to be floating in a tin can, swinging in a hammock and listening to the constant clanging of the ship—a sitting duck waiting for the worst to happen.

My mother was a member of the Civil Nursing Reserve, set up in 1938 to boost capacity within the service as the Government became aware of the scale of the nursing shortage. The UK entered the Covid-19 pandemic with no reserve capacity and tried to create some headroom with a temporary register. This generated another 20,000 nurses to provide a buffer zone to build surge capacity. The temporary register closed in March 2024, but it is imperative that we learn the lessons of Covid in terms of building reserve capacity.

My mother was also a member of the Civil Defence Corps after the war, which trained volunteers in community emergency preparedness. Module 1 of the Covid inquiry, chaired by the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Hallett, concluded:

"Preparedness for and resilience to a whole-system civil emergency must be treated in much the same way as we treat a threat from a hostile state".

Does my noble friend the Minister agree that we must implement the Covid inquiry's recommendations within the UK and devolved Governments to prepare for a whole-system civil emergency? I urge your Lordships' House to reflect on the broader lessons of VE Day in securing our combined health and security needs for the future.

1.22 pm

Lord Sandhurst (Con): My Lords, we have heard many powerful speeches today. I congratulate the right reverend Prelate on her excellent maiden speech, and I commend the Minister for his compelling opening.

I shall start with the example of my late father's war service. It is just one example of how lucky we have been because of the courage and determination of those who served selflessly. He joined the Royal Air Force on 4 September 1939. It was his 19th birthday. What followed marked his life for ever. He never talked in detail about his experiences to us, his family, until the last few weeks of his life. He was a navigator/bomb aimer. In April 1941, he joined 149 Squadron, operating Wellingtons out of Mildenhall. One notable operation included an attack in daylight on the battleships "Scharnhorst" and "Gneisenau", which were heavily defended in dry dock in Brest. He said that the noise of the guns at some 8,000 feet was deafening.

In the next eight months or so to December, my father completed the 30 operations of his first tour but, by then, his squadron had lost a total of two more crews than its nominal strength—just think of that. Having miraculously survived that tour, he was sent to train new bomb aimers. He then later resumed operational duties as a squadron bombing leader in Lancasters, but he flew much less often—only when a crew needed a spare bomb aimer.

His operational duties continued until December 1944. That year, he still had two bad experiences. Once, they returned shot up, on only two engines. Another time, the left undercarriage was shot to pieces. It collapsed on landing. His back was never the same, but he counted himself a lucky man. In all, he completed 43 operations. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

To put his experience in perspective, only a tiny percentage of those who started with him as Bomber Command air crew, signing up in 1939, survived. He told me frankly that each operation terrified him. At the end of the war, he said that he sometimes found it hard to cross a London road; he could not believe that he was still alive. He was a stalwart attendee of squadron reunions and annual memorial services. He was much involved in RAF and Bomber Command Association activities. He never forgot those with whom he served; nor must we.

Looking forward, I commend the plan to make it a criminal offence to climb our war memorials. Our society must understand and value what these represent. We must not forget our past or lose our resolve. We must educate the young. Today, we are, I fear, closer to war than we have been for many years. This would bring grave loss of life and property. Look at Ukraine: imagine if nuclear weapons came into play.

We therefore need rapidly to increase the defence budget. That requires sacrifices. I remind this House that, in 1955-56, after the end of the Korean War and 10 years after the world wars, the UK still spent approximately 7% of its gross national product on defence. Deterrence is vital. In the 1930s, we failed to deter Hitler. The price of that was terrible. We have to make attack of any sort unaffordable to an aggressor.

We must build up our weaponry and our forces so that they are capable of inflicting matching injury on any attacker.

We also need to build civil resilience. We must put resources into protecting vital undersea cables, our electricity, our IT and our other fundamental services. Last Monday in the *Times*, Oliver Letwin described our woeful unreadiness. The attacks on the Co-op, Harrods and others show how easy it is to damage vital IT.

It took nearly six years of the awful world war whose end we celebrate now to obtain peace. We must now build conscious memories in society. We must rearm properly. We must build civilian resilience. We must not fritter what we have. I commend in particular the speech of the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup. We must always remember. We must act accordingly.

1.28 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, we have had an interesting series of days commemorating World War II 80 years on. In your Lordships' House, we have had wonderful tributes from many people and heard about their experiences.

However, it is interesting that many other countries are reported to have marked the event with a more commemorative process, around not glorification but peace, because, as many noble Lords have said, peace is of course not assured. It is about recognising that war now affects whole populations, whatever the outcome. As the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, said, many people in Europe had to wait for 45 years after the end of the Second World War before they got any liberation at all, basically.

We tend to think we were always on the right side—the side of good—but I am afraid our track record is not perfect. My grandfather fought in the Boer War, which was a very long time ago. I do not think he was involved in concentration camps, but we did invent them in South Africa. Boer and African women and children were locked in tented accommodation with very little food, water and sanitation, and no hope of how they might escape. They were the civilian population whose properties had been treated as scorched earth by General Lord Kitchener. Where were they going to live?

It is surprising that only one person was brave enough to challenge these camps: a lady called Emily Hobhouse, who came from Devon or Cornwall. She challenged the Government to provide food and everything like that, and was ostracised by the Government and nearly locked up. Kitchener refused to see her in South Africa because she was a woman, which is an interesting way of looking at things. Hundreds of thousands of women and children were incarcerated, having committed no crime except being on the wrong side. At the end of the Boer War, most of the Boer women and a few others contributed to a very large memorial in Bloemfontein—you can see it on the web—to commemorate 28,000 women and children who died in the camps, plus all the people who managed to get out in the end.

There seemed to be no leadership or understanding here of what was going on. I am not saying that our invention—if that is what it is—of concentration camps

[LORD BERKELEY]

was being copied in the two World Wars; the German example was a million times worse. However, it is time that we learned lessons from such things. As my noble friend Lady Amos said: education on these things for all.

We should follow the example of Emily Hobhouse and put much greater emphasis on trying to bring peace, rather than death, on the battlefield—or, in the case of South Africa, death after a scorched earth policy. There are a few scorched earths going on in Ukraine at the moment, and it is still happening in the world, as many noble Lords have said—in Africa, Ukraine and Gaza.

We must remember our successes and failures in an open and inclusive manner, and we need to educate the world, as other noble Lords have said. The transfer and movement of students and young people between different parts of Europe and the world will help their understanding—and our understanding—as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham said. I hope that the movement of students and everyone else will be part of an education process to understand what we have done in the past—mostly very well but occasionally with some serious lapses, which tend to get shoved under the carpet when we should recognise them as well.

1.33 pm

Lord Farmer (Con): My Lords, I join many others in complimenting, first, the Minister on his inspiring opening speech to this debate. I also compliment the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her speech. I was particularly encouraged by her focus on families, a subject dear to my heart.

These victories in Europe and the Far East were primarily over wicked, dangerous and anti-human ideas. John Maynard Keynes said:

“Ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else”.

Ideologies that took over in Germany and Japan justified the complete domination of their regions: German territorial expansion into central and eastern Europe and Japanese subjugation of east Asia. Such coercive ideologies undermine human flourishing and lead to the killing, at worst, or silencing, at best, of vast swathes of populations. Most recently, trans ideology came close to doing the latter.

Ideologies’ victims just do not fit with the programme, frequently because of immutable characteristics, such as those born Jews in Nazi Germany, or they simply do not or cannot see the world through the ideological lens imposed on them. Hence, freedom of thought and expression are such precious values.

Yet there is a deeply human need for absolutes and certainties, which post-modern relativism has barely dented. Mathematician and philosopher Professor John Lennox exposes the self-contradiction at the heart of post-modernism. It expects us to accept as absolute truth that there are no absolute truths. New atheists proclaiming atheism’s truth and denying God defy post-modernism. Jürgen Habermas, an earlier atheist, voiced dangers of the shift from our moral basis to the post-modern. He said:

“Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. To this day, there is no alternative to it ... we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk”.

New atheists such as Richard Dawkins recognise that jettisoning what he refers to as “cultural Christianity”, something the post-war West has come perilously close to doing, means that the flowerings reeled off by Habermas will lose their roots and wither. That said, we have lived through 80 years of the greatest advances in the history of the world. From a technological, scientific and health perspective, no previous 80 years have ever been better to live in, so the sacrifice of those who secured the victories in Europe and Japan has been worth it—but we cannot rest on their laurels. The survival of any world order cannot be guaranteed, and threats abound.

I see four “D”s of decline and decay surrounding us, such as the towering levels of debt. Shopper politics provokes Governments to borrow lavishly, and private debt is egged on by consumerism. Demographically, we and many other nations are in a bind. Ageing populations are not replaced by new births or supported by younger generations, as the extent of older-age loneliness reveals. It is socially acceptable to say that one is too selfish to have children, and other forms of decadence are reinforced. Popular culture tells us to live for the moment, avoid sacrifice, self-denial or service. Finally, concerns over, for example, historical slavery, sharply divide us over whether western civilisation is even worth defending or upholding.

Yet the motivation to care about, speak up for and protest over the weak, the vulnerable and those who have not, often at great personal cost, flows, per Habermas, from our Judeo-Christian foundations. The Roman Empire into which Jesus Christ was born was not at all so inclined. Our freedom to pursue those ends was bought for us by those willing to stand against vicious, authoritarian regimes.

Defeat, then, was not inevitable—neither is decline now. YouGov polling in the Bible Society’s *Quiet Revival* report found an increase of 50% in church attendance across all ages, with the most dramatic church attendance growth among young men. Now, more than one in five are attending church at least monthly—ditto, almost one in two young Black people aged 18 to 34.

Perhaps those Judeo-Christian foundations of justice and love, which proved so effective in beating back the dark ideologies of the Second World War, are surfacing again. A new generation is discovering that in a relationship with our maker and with each other, in Habermas’s “collective life in solidarity”, lies the wellspring of meaning and the essence of what it means to be human.

1.39 pm

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): It is right that we undertake this debate to pay tribute to those who defended our freedoms in the First and Second World Wars. We must remember and honour them, and use this day to commemorate the 80th anniversary of

VE Day and, shortly, on 14 August, VJ Day. We have heard some magnificent speeches, all of which have been of a high quality. Many consisted of people relaying their personal experiences, many of which have been moving.

I was there. I was less than a year old at the time, and not aware of it. Subsequently, my parents never really talked about the war. That is the experience of a number of noble Lords.

The point I want to make in the context of this debate, which has already been made by my noble friends Lady Warwick of Undercliffe and Lord Anderson of Swansea, is that this was a total war: everyone was involved. Total war refers to a type of warfare in which a country mobilises all its resources—economic, industrial, civilian and military—to defeat an enemy. In total war, the distinction between civilian and military targets is blurred and the entire society is involved in the war effort. In World War II, the concept of total war was fully realised in the United Kingdom; there was a mobilisation of the entire population in the war effort.

This is not to downplay the exceptional bravery of those at the military front line but, in the Second World War, all of us were on the front line, in a real sense, on the home front. Here in the United Kingdom, we conscripted millions of soldiers but also mobilised civilians to work in factories, grow food and support the effort. I thank my noble friend for mentioning the Bevin Boys, conscripted to work in the mines, and the women directed to work in the Women's Land Army.

We must also remember that civilians were targeted and that cities were bombed deliberately to destroy morale and infrastructure. I am not seeking here to express any judgment, but in the war there was the bombing of London—the Blitz—but also of Dresden and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The point I make is that, in that war, we were all on the front line. As a trivial example, I cannot forget that, shortly after I was born, we were under attack from V1 and V2 rockets. I was evacuated with my mother to Wales, out of their reach.

The third aspect of total war was industrial and economic control. Governments took control of production. For example, here in Britain, we introduced widespread rationing of food and goods. Total war in World War II meant that every aspect of society was directed towards achieving victory, no matter the cost. Everyone was fighting; those in the forces and those on the home front were fighting for victory.

We achieved victory. The biggest achievement in western Europe has been the absence of any significant war in western Europe in the last 80 years, compared to the 80 years before that when there were at least six major wars. This was a massive change and a victory for the settlement that was reached after the Second World War.

1.44 pm

Lord Sentamu (CB): My Lords, I too congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her marvellous speech, especially as it focused on children. I also want to thank the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, for his wide-ranging speech; as the opening batsman, he scored 100 not out.

On VE Day and VJ Day, I was a child not yet conceived, but when I was five years old, I met my Uncle Sam. He sat me down and told me that he and my other uncle, called Fred, were members of the King's African Rifles, East African Command. They went to war, to Burma, as it was then, in a very big company from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika. They joined other companies from the rest of colonial Africa. Then, he abruptly walked away, but I did not move.

My uncle returned nearly an hour later and continued: "Your Uncle Fred was shot in a fierce battle. We buried him in a grave in Burma. It took a very long time to get all of us who were not killed back to our different barracks. The images of the fierce battle in which your Uncle Fred was killed still haunt me. I get nightmares, which are terrifying". He got up and went for a long walk in the family banana groves, which were extensive—17 acres in total.

My mum told me: "Uncle Sam is not well. He has never been violent, but his thought patterns often get jumbled up and he cannot focus on one thing. The short conversation he just had with you is the best we have heard since he returned. He takes some medicine daily. When he does not, he is really sad, and we need to keep our eye on him. He lives 40 miles away with your Auntie Zepora, and it is terrifying when he goes missing for periods of time. The war in Burma knocked a big chunk of his memory out".

I will stop there, instead of telling more of the effects of the war in Burma on my Uncle Sam. We know now, of course, that the country was called not Burma but Myanmar; but the British could not get their tongues around Myanmar. What still surprises me, though, is the failure of the Colonial Office to erect memorials in all the African countries for the veterans of the King's African Rifles. As we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, the best memorial is always local, because it teaches people lessons that are not from a long distance.

It is indeed right and proper for us to celebrate 80 years since the war ended, and the victory that came with it. As we celebrate, let us hear clearly the message from Sir Edward Elgar in his cello concerto which addressed the futility of war. The way in which Jacqueline du Pré played it sends that message loud and clear; as the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley of Knighton, knows, I am the proud owner of a personally signed copy of that album.

To respond to violence with more violence increases darkness on a night devoid of stars. May we all be instruments of peace and justice, lovers of peace, because our world desperately needs this. The men and women we remember today did not die in vain. Their memory is calling us to hold the torch of peace. Their blood cries to us for peace and justice. Let us do it, and let us do it now.

1.49 pm

Lord Hacking (Lab): My Lords, I take part in this debate as one of the few old enough to remember VE Day and the subsequent VJ Day—but not the only one; my noble friend Lord Dubs was 12 years old in May 1945, and I was only seven years old. I particularly remember the wartime conditions that had been part

[LORD HACKING]

of my life right up to VE Day, such as the blackout requirements. Every house had to have blackout curtains to prevent the exposure of light to enemy aircraft passing above at night. Similarly, every train had to have blackout blinds, and when you arrived at a station you were not permitted to exit the train and open the door until you heard one of the porters shouting the name of that station. If it was the correct station, it was only then that you were permitted to leave the train.

I have one memory of particular significance. I was in our house with my younger brother, who was about three years old; I would have been about five or six. My mother was taking my grandmother to the bus for her to go home. She seemed to be taking an awfully long time, so I flung open the floor and let a good light shine out on to the driveway, up which came not my mother but a policeman. I was terrified. I thought I was going to be sent to prison. It was therefore to my great relief that my mother arrived and I managed to escape imprisonment.

It was my mother who told me that the war was over. This did not mean much to me. Bombing had ceased and the flying bombs, known as doodlebugs, were ceasing. The feeling then in the country was not of great jubilation and festivity, as in London and other towns, but a sense of great relief.

My most poignant memory was the return of the fathers who fought in the war. Several friends of mine had lost their fathers in the war. I remember one day around VE Day that a friend was weeping because his father was not coming home.

My most vivid memory was of the victory parade of 8 June 1946. Marching soldiers, armoured vehicles and tanks all came by, not only from the British forces but from our allies. It was General Montgomery's heyday. He was wearing his beret, made famous in the Eighth Army in north Africa, and by God he enjoyed taking part in that victory parade.

It was most touching yesterday to see Members of this House returning from Westminster Abbey with a row of medals. One of them was the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, who unfortunately is not in the Chamber at this moment. Indeed, I saw an admiral in full uniform yesterday in the House—I leave it to my noble friends to identify this particular admiral.

I wondered, therefore, whether this debate was relevant today. All those who served in the forces in World War II must be over 100 years old now. Indeed, I think I have heard mention of only one soldier who is still alive. My concern was, as I repeat: was this debate going to be relevant? But the fine speeches from my noble friend Lord Coaker, the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire—I am glad to get his attention now—and above all the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, have changed that. This debate is relevant, and I endorse every word of those speakers and others who have made it relevant.

1.54 pm

Baroness Kingsmill (Lab): My Lords, yesterday we celebrated VE Day with a fly-past, parades and parties. It was a happy time, a reflection of the relief and joy

that was felt at the end of a long and terrible war, a war which reshaped the world and touched nearly every family across the UK and beyond. We have heard many wonderful stories today of people's memories, and of their experiences of their fathers, their grandfathers and others.

For me, as for many noble colleagues, it was also personal. My father came from New Zealand to serve in the Royal Air Force. He flew missions in Liberators at very low altitudes, hunting enemy submarines to protect the convoys that kept Britain supplied during the darkest days of the war. I like to think that possibly he protected a convoy that the father of the noble Baroness, Lady Rafferty, was sailing in—that would be a nice connection. He also met and married my mother, a young woman from the Welsh valleys, who spent much of the war years working in a munitions factory.

In many ways, they were representative of the commitment of the Commonwealth countries and of women to the war effort. Recently, on 25 April, we remembered the sacrifice of the Anzacs. Many Australian and New Zealand servicemen were fighting on behalf of the UK and the rest of Europe at the time. I also point out that my grandfather fought on behalf of the UK at Gallipoli and was injured there, so in the family we had a history of Commonwealth support for the European wars.

Like so many others have mentioned, my parents spoke very little about what happened, but we know and have learned what it cost, and we know what it means. Victory came at an enormous price. Millions died, families were broken and Europe was left in ruins. Yet out of this devastation came a determination to prevent such a war happening again.

We need to remember the role of our allies, particularly the United States. Although initially it was reluctant to enter the war, it became a decisive and committed partner in the fight against tyranny. Out of that co-operation, NATO was born. A shared commitment among democratic nations to stand together in defence of peace and security, NATO has been a cornerstone of European stability ever since. Its member states, united by common values, continue to play an essential role in deterring aggression and upholding international law. I am pleased to be part of the British contribution to NATO.

We are now, however, reminded that such peace cannot be taken for granted. The war in Ukraine is a stark and painful warning. Once again, people are fighting and dying in Europe; once again, a sovereign country is resisting an aggressor. We cannot be complacent. Europe may be on the brink of war again. Maybe it already is at war, maybe in a different form. The cyberattacks that have been taking place across Europe are maybe the modern equivalent of bombs. Our Armed Forces in the UK and across our alliances continue to play a vital role in defending our values and supporting peace and stability. We owe them not only our thanks but our full and active support. We need to increase their numbers.

The past holds powerful lessons, and one of the clearest is this: peace is not the absence of war. It is something that we need to build, protect and uphold

day by day, generation by generation. We honour those who fought by living up to the world they hoped to create.

1.59 pm

Lord Lingfield (Con): My Lords, I remind your Lordships of my registered interest as chairman of the Cadet Vocational College. I do so because today I shall refer particularly to the engagement of cadets in the war effort and in the marking this week of the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

By 1945 the cadet services had been part of national life for many years. Indeed, their roots were in the rifle volunteer battalions for home defence, within which some schools formed cadet detachments in the 1860s. By the beginning of World War II there were some 180 Army cadet units, and during the early 1940s Royal Navy and Royal Air Force sections were added as well. These all ensured that a good number of the young recruits to the services had covered much basic training before they were called up aged 18 to fight for their country.

During the war, many hundreds of young cadets aged between 16 and 18 could and did assist the Home Guard and learned, among many other skills, how to help with the manning of gun emplacements, how to guard important buildings, how to take and deliver messages by radio, how to administer first aid in the aftermath of bomb attacks and even how to deal with explosives. Inevitably, no small number of those young civilians were injured and even killed. One of the good things that emerged from that time of great national suffering was the creation after the war of the Combined Cadet Force, mainly in independent selective schools then, but now, 80 years later, the majority of cadet units is in state secondary schools of all kinds throughout the United Kingdom, very often in disadvantaged areas.

This week, as we have heard, many events have commemorated victory in Europe and I am delighted to say that Sea Cadets, Royal Air Force Cadets, Army Cadets and combined cadet units have featured prominently in most of them. On Monday, cadets were on duty for the procession at the Queen Victoria Memorial outside Buckingham Palace. On Tuesday, London naval cadets were assisting World War II veterans at the Tower of London. Cadets were also present at the Downing Street party, and Royal Berkshire and other cadets were chosen to attend yesterday's service at Westminster Abbey. Some 300 places were reserved for cadets and their families from across the United Kingdom at yesterday's concert on Horse Guards. The young people who took part in uniform in this week's commemorations will remember them for a long time and, we hope, will take away many lessons about the patriotism, courage and sacrifice that the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, spoke of in his excellent introductory speech.

In March, a report was published by Northampton University entitled *The Impact and Value of School-Based Cadet Forces*. It has a foreword by the present Minister for Veterans, Alistair Carns MP, in which he says that "participation in the many exciting, challenging and fun activities provided by Cadet Forces ... can help develop self-confidence,

teamwork, leadership and resilience in young people ... to help prepare young people for the many challenges that they face ... thereby setting them up to succeed".

The report's findings were that, while delivering excellent value for public money, cadet forces create positive impacts for schools, including giving students from all backgrounds opportunities to come together, contributing to the prevention of absenteeism, reducing exclusions, creating positive attitudes and a sense of belonging, and fostering community engagement—for instance, the attendance of uniform cadet bands in local remembrance services and other events. Also mentioned were the opportunities for cadets to gain important qualifications through the Cadet Vocational College, leading to greater employability.

The Combined Cadet Force, founded at a time of great national adversity, has lived on to become an outstanding component of our education system. The aim of the cadet services 80 years ago, at the time of victory in Europe, was to train young men to be good soldiers. Their aim today is to train young people to become good citizens, and I commend their work to your Lordships' House.

2.04 pm

Lord Sahota (Lab): My Lords, it is a great honour and privilege to take part in this VE Day debate in your Lordships' House. The Second World War was a conflict that had to be fought to save our civilisation from the tyranny of fascism. It lasted nearly six years and claimed the lives of over 75 million people. It was a bloody, brutal war marked by the genocide, destruction and unimaginable horror of the Holocaust.

On the allied side, people of all faiths and backgrounds came together to defeat the forces of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. When a call went out from Britain to its subjects in Asia and Africa, millions volunteered to serve. It became the largest voluntary army the world has ever seen. From the Indian subcontinent alone, some 2.5 million people answered the call. Of those, approximately 15% were Sikhs—despite Sikhs comprising only 2% of the Indian population at the time. Their overrepresentation speaks volumes about their bravery and loyalty.

They served in virtually every theatre of war, including Burma, Italy, El Alamein and other places. Their valour did not go unrecognised. They were awarded numerous honours—Victoria Crosses, Military Crosses and Distinguished Service Medals. In the Burmese jungle, Naik Gian Singh of the 15th Punjab Regiment received the Victoria Cross for exceptional courage. I mention this because my maternal uncle, Santokh Singh, served in the same regiment and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in the same campaign. His medals remain cherished by our family to this day.

Sikh soldiers were recruited in such numbers because they were considered a martial race yet, despite their commitment and sacrifice, they were not paid the same as their British counterparts. This injustice was the result of colonial policy. In death, all soldiers were equal; on the battlefield, they were not.

After the war, their contributions were too often omitted from the dominant narrative. The newsreels of the time showed only white British troops returning

[LORD SAHOTA]

home in triumph. The perception that victory was achieved solely by British forces took hold. It was born not from the malice of the public but from a lack of leadership, political will and historical honesty. While British soldiers were rightly honoured, paraded and cared for, many Commonwealth soldiers returned home to their hardship with meagre pensions. Those who once stood shoulder to shoulder in the trenches became a footnote in history. Their sacrifice slipped into obscurity.

Time has moved on. Today, Britain is one of the most diverse, tolerant and pluralistic societies, but, when it comes to acknowledging this part of our shared history—the contribution of Commonwealth soldiers—much work remains.

There have been steps in the right direction. Recently, Royal Mail issued a stamp featuring Mahinder Singh Pujji, a Sikh soldier who fought proudly wearing his turban while serving in the Second World War. These symbolic recognitions matter. Many military historians now acknowledge that, without the contribution of Indian soldiers, particularly Sikh soldiers, the outcome of several battles or perhaps even the war might have been different.

It is vital that our VE Day and other commemorations properly include service men and women from the Commonwealth. The British public deserve the full picture of how victory was secured. That must change. As the great Nigerian author Chinua Achebe once said,

“until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”.

The time has come for the lions to have their own historians.

There has been a sustained campaign by the Sikh community and Sikh soldiers in the UK, for many years, to have a Sikh regiment in the British Army. I would like to add my name to that campaign.

2.09 pm

Lord Carter of Haslemere (CB): My Lords, in this landmark and moving debate, I would like to mention the Battle of Monte Cassino, which I do not think has been mentioned, but which deserves to be. It also has personal resonance for me and my family. Let us recall its significance: it was one of the most brutal engagements of the war, resulting in more than 75,000 allied and German casualties. The objective was to break through the German Gustav line, a heavily fortified series of defences, which ran the width of Italy just south of Rome. Hitler had ordered that the line was to be held at all costs. Monte Cassino was a Benedictine abbey, founded in the sixth century and situated at the top of a towering 1,700-foot hill overlooking the main road to Rome. With its heavily fortified mountain defences, Monte Cassino formed the linchpin of the Gustav line.

The overall strategy was to force the Germans to commit the maximum number of divisions in Italy at the time of the cross-channel invasion of Normandy. The thinking was that if as many German forces as possible were tied down in Italy they could not be redeployed to France. Monte Cassino therefore played a crucial part in the success of the D-Day landings.

The battle consisted of four huge allied military assaults on Monte Cassino, from January to May 1944, comprising an extraordinary multinational force including French, US, New Zealand, Indian, Gurkha, Canadian, South African, British and Polish regiments—and others. The first three assaults were all repulsed, with heavy casualties, by massive German resistance, facilitated by their entrenched positions on the hill, as well as terrible winter flooding from heavy rains.

The fourth and final engagement was led by the Polish, with support from the British Eighth Army and other allies. It started at 2300 on 11 May 1944, with an artillery bombardment by 1,060 guns of the Eighth Army, and ended with the successful routing of the enemy from the abbey. The road to Rome was thereby opened and the city was taken on 4 June 1944, just two days before the Normandy invasion. My father was a gunner with the Eighth Army who had fought in the north Africa campaign before crossing into Italy. He was in the final assault on Monte Cassino and was manning one of those 1,060 guns. During the battle, he was wounded by shrapnel and hospitalised with sepsis. As your Lordships can see, he survived. He lived to a great age—102, in fact—but he lost many close friends during the assault on Monte Cassino.

Long after the war, in the 1960s, our family returned to Monte Cassino and visited the British and German war graves. There we met the mother of a German soldier who had fallen. For many years afterwards, she and my mother corresponded with each other. Blessed are the peacemakers.

2.13 pm

Lord Rook (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in what has been a most moving and inspiring debate. I give my congratulations in particular to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on a wonderful maiden speech, and I welcome her. It is always good to have another former youth and children’s worker in the House.

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government hosted an exhibition titled, “Great Faith: Stories of Sacrifice and Contribution”. Here I must declare an interest, as I am a partner at the Good Faith Partnership, which played a modest role in supporting Colourful Heritage, the wonderful charity that produced this arresting exhibition.

On Wednesday, visitors to the atrium at the MHCLG came face to face with 80 extraordinary individuals. Each picture, painted by the renowned portrait artist Arabella Dorman, commemorates and celebrates the lives of a Muslim serving in our Armed Forces from World War I to this very day. My remarks henceforth will no doubt pick up similar themes to those shared by my noble friend Lord Sahota.

Each face tells a story of faithfulness to God and to country. One painting is of Abdul Hafiz, the first Muslim soldier to win the Victoria Cross. On 6 April 1944, Abdul Hafiz led his platoon up a treacherous hillside in Japan. Already wounded, he seized a Japanese machine gun and led a charge of such ferocity that the enemy fled the battlefield.

Another portrait features Noor Inayat Khan, a British resistance agent who served as a wireless operator for the Special Operations Executive, supporting the resistance in France. Noor, whose Arabic name translates as “radiant light”, took the codename “Madeleine”. Following the arrest of her colleagues, Noor remained in France, moving from place to place. Dancing in the shadows of the darkest hour, she transmitted messages back to London. True to her faith, her country and her name, she shed essential light on the dangerous activities of Nazi forces. She was eventually betrayed, arrested and subsequently executed at Dachau. Noor Inayat Khan was posthumously awarded the George Cross.

Muhammad Hussain, who also featured in the exhibition, was 16 years old when he ran away from home to join the volunteer British Indian Army in 1941. He served as a machine-gunner in the Indian 8th Infantry Division, fought in the battle of Monte Cassino—the noble Lord, Lord Carter, will be pleased at a second mention—and, on VE Day, Muhammad and his comrades advanced into Austria. The war over, he moved to the United Kingdom, where he lives to this day—one of the last remaining veterans of VE Day. As if his military service did not offer enough, Muhammad has dedicated the last 75 years to serving his local community and our country, supporting fellow veterans and promoting greater understanding among young people.

I am grateful to my noble friends Lord Coaker and Lord Boateng, and the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, among others, for drawing our attention to the contributions of service men and women from the Commonwealth countries, particularly in Africa and on the eastern front. Lest we forget, more than 5.5 million Muslims fought as part of the allied forces in World War II, with a staggering 1.5 million killed during the conflict. Yet research from British Future indicates that only 34% of the British public are aware that Muslim men and women served in the Second World War.

At the “Great Faith” exhibition, my noble friend the Minister for Faith, Communities and Resettlement, Lord Khan, announced progress in the creation of a national Muslim war memorial. I am grateful to His Majesty’s Government for the progress made and, with other noble Lords, look forward to paying my respects at that memorial in due time.

I humbly ask His Majesty’s Government to seize the gift offered to our country through the creativity of Colourful Heritage and the artistry of Arabella Dorman to ensure that these beautiful paintings are seen and these powerful stories told up and down our land. I hope that these heroic faces will be seen in schools and universities, government buildings and community settings, places of work and of worship. I hope that these stories will be told far and wide.

Lastly, one final face staring out of the canvas in the “Great Faith” exhibition belongs to Imam Asim Hafiz, the first imam to serve as a chaplain in the Armed Forces. He serves today as an adviser to the Ministry of Defence and as a reservist in our Army. Imam Asim wrote:

“As a British Muslim and someone privileged to serve alongside our Armed Forces, VE Day reminds me of the often-overlooked sacrifices made by Muslims in the struggle against tyranny and in

promoting peace. Today, I see that same spirit of service and dedication in the British Muslim personnel I work with, proud to wear the uniform, grounded in faith, and committed to the values we all defend. I believe a good Muslim makes a good British soldier”.

Whether their service is in the past, present or future, when it comes to our Muslim service men and women, we should remember them.

2.19 pm

Baroness Porter of Fulwood (Con): My Lords, 80 years ago, my grandparents, Bert and Winnie Firmin, were at the theatre when the show was interrupted with the announcement that the war was over. Bert, stationed for the duration of the war on Malta as an RAF electrician working on Spitfires, had managed to get a few days’ leave to come home and marry Winnie. They wed on 7 May 1945. Peace was the best wedding present they could have had. Their story is a testament to the resilience and unity that defined a generation. Bert’s house in south-east London was destroyed early in the war. With no home of his own, he stayed with relatives in Bradford during his leave and met Winnie, who lived next door. She spent the war weaving nylon for parachutes.

After the war, they joined a self-build group in Essex, answering an advert in a paper. They purchased a potato field, alongside others, with a loan from the local council. Over several years, between them the group built 13 pairs of semi-detached houses. They dedicated every weekend and their precious annual leave to this endeavour. That street of houses still stands today.

Stories such as this, and all those we have heard today, are the legacy we have inherited: a legacy of perseverance, hope, courage, community and renewal. The war shaped Britain. It is a different country today from what it would have been otherwise. We are different today from how we would have been otherwise. As the noble Baroness, Lady Kingsmill, has already pointed out, peace, as we know, is not just not war; it is something in itself, something of substance that we build and shape.

I love the story about the street my grandfather helped build, because it is a story about people bringing what skills and abilities they had together and being stronger because of it. Many of the most acute challenges we currently face domestically require collective rebuilding. They require us to strengthen our communities and deepen the social bonds between people. This is as true when we talk about tackling loneliness as it is about tackling crime. It is also true as we look at the vast array of global challenges we face. As geopolitical tensions—many of which have been referred to today—mount, we must prioritise defence spending and evolve our focus to reflect growing threats from technological advances, including disinformation and cyberattacks.

It is not enough, though, to commit to raise our defence spending and to make sure that we have the right capabilities; we also need to encourage our allies to do likewise. We cannot act in isolation. We are only ever as strong as those stood alongside us. As we commemorate today, let us take the lessons from the stories we have heard on how to shape peace and forge preparedness.

2.23 pm

Baroness Ramsey of Wall Heath (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure and an honour to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Porter of Fulwood, and all noble Lords, with so many moving speeches about the sacrifices of family members—I am thinking particularly at the moment of Uncle Vernon. It was also a pleasure to hear the excellent maiden speech by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough.

My speech is about family, in particular my father Jim Ramsey, who died, sadly, in 1990. I am wearing his cap badge and carrying one of his medals—I know we are not allowed props, but I hope noble Lords will forgive me—as my mother did when my sister and I went with her to Normandy in 2004 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day. I also want to mention her brother, Patrick Cafferkey, who flew in Wellington bombers, as well as his wife Winifred and my father's sister, Jenny, who both worked in munitions factories in Lancashire during the war, coming home after long, arduous shifts with yellow faces.

My dad joined the Westminster Dragoons aged 18 in 1941. I am grateful to the regimental association and know that it will be watching this debate. He was a gunner in the track and tank corps, responsible for maintaining the flails on the tank that blew up land mines ahead of the infantry. He landed on D-Day and took part in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen—never to be forgotten by him—which I spoke about in my contribution to the Holocaust Memorial Day debate recently, and in guarding Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin after peace was declared.

Sadly, I never recorded him speaking about his war years, so all my memories are from normal, everyday conversations with him, usually as a result of us children asking him questions. He prefaced anything that he said in response to our wows and exclamations with his assertion that his—to us, extraordinary—experiences seemed completely normal at the time, as everyone was in the same boat.

He wrote these words in an exercise book for my mum to type up for a local sixth-form student who had asked him about D-day:

“At the beginning of May 1944, A Squadron Westminster Dragoons was stationed at Thorpeness in Suffolk. We had to waterproof our tanks. Every inch of the outside had to be brushed and all of the nuts and bolts, openings, escape hatches and gun ports were sealed and made waterproof. It was boring, dirty work and took a fortnight. It was unnecessary in the event for we landed dry-shod.

On trains, we transported the tanks to Sussex, where we were put under armed guard and not allowed out of the area where we lived in tents. We could write no letters. We were given new clothes, paid in French francs and taken into a hut, which was very heavily guarded, and shown a map with mythical names. It was a map of Normandy. I remember the town hall had the code name ‘Poland’ and was to be taken on the first day. We were sworn to secrecy.

We set sail in the dark of the night of 5 June and, when morning came on the 6th, we were not alone. There were ships as far as the eye could see, from horizon to horizon. Normandy came into sight and we got ready. We had a motorcycle strapped on the back of the tank and a motorcyclist riding on the turret. I offered to share the gunner's seat with him, but he declined. He joined me quickly when something flew past his head. Shells were falling round us and a ship near us was hit.

Our B and C Squadrons had landed with the first wave three hours earlier. We were to push inland with the tanks of the Staffordshire Yeomanry and ordinary Shermans. We went past the village of Hermanville. We had landed on Queen Beach and were crawling through open fields a few hundred yards past the town when tanks behind us began to blow up. Three flails and a half-track were knocked out by anti-tank fire on our right. We carried on some distance until we halted on the bridge. We waited for the advance, which never came. We stuck thereabouts, guarding the flank until five in the afternoon. A great mass of four-engined bombers and gliders came in on our left to reinforce the original airborne drop on the River Orne. Quite a number were shot down, and one Stirling crashed close to us. Next came a report that 40 Tiger tanks were heading our way. We feared the worst. I have since read that these tanks were stopped by an anti-tank screen, which the British had posted on their line of advance.

At last, it began to grow dark, and all the tanks withdrew to form a laager further back. We filled up with petrol and ammunition and made a cup of tea. I was on guard for two hours. I heard three single German planes up above, and so much flak was sent up from our bridgehead that all three were shot down on fire. We were up at first light, at about four o'clock. D-day was over, and D+1 had started”.

He wrote this on the same piece of paper about the months that followed:

“We had bread for the first time a month later. I slept in a bed again on Christmas Eve in Brussels, where I had 48 hours leave from Holland. All the infantry who landed with us were killed or wounded within a few months. Several infantry divisions were disbanded later. I was really glad not to be in the infantry”.

Every Remembrance Sunday, my dad took us, his children, to the war memorial, and toasted fallen and injured comrades in Calvados from Normandy. Today, dad, my sister Alison and I will toast you, Uncle Pat, Auntie Win and Auntie Jenny for everything you and so many other brave men and women, including from the Commonwealth, did for us.

2.28 pm

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, it is an honour and a privilege to be one of the winders in this debate, a debate that is of huge significance as a reminder of what has happened in the last 80 years, what happened in the years before World War II, and the issues that we need think about in 2025.

The noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, talked about the importance of personal stories. We have heard today so many personal stories of very different types, most recently from the noble Baroness, Lady Ramsey, whose personal stories were incredibly interesting and help us think about how we respond to some of the other contributions today. My noble friend Lord Wallace asked how we find a way of talking to young people about World War II. We are getting to the point, as several noble Lords have said, when there will no nobody who fought in World War II left to celebrate future commemorations.

Unlike, I think, almost anybody else speaking in the debate today, as a child my parents never talked about the war. They did not ever suggest that I watch Remembrance Sunday. Yet, somehow, I would run home from mass on Remembrance Sunday because I wanted to watch the service from the Cenotaph—I do not know what drew me to it. In those days, there were still veterans from World War I parading; now there are very few even from World War II. What do we need to

do to help young people understand not just the past but the present—and the importance of peace for our generation and beyond?

My noble friend Lord Wallace talked about education, as did my noble friend Lady Benjamin. She and the noble Baroness, Lady Amos, rightly challenged us to think about not just British service personnel, not just what we did on the home front, but the support and the actions given by our Commonwealth friends, particularly those from the Caribbean. The noble Lord, Lord Howell, talked about Commonwealth contributions, as did the noble Lord, Lord Boateng and the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sentamu. They all reminded us of the contributions that have been made by the Commonwealth.

The noble Lord, Lord Sahota, reminded us that we need to think about those who volunteered to work with the British Army, because it is so easy, when we commemorate VE Day, to think about Europe but very much from a British perspective. The Commonwealth mattered. Without our Commonwealth partners and allies, could we have won the war on our own? It is vital that we remember the contributions not just of British service personnel but of those from the Commonwealth, and to think about whom we were fighting with and whom we were fighting against.

This week, the first week of May, is a week of many commemorations. In the Netherlands, the celebration was on 5 May. In the United Kingdom, we celebrate on 8 May. The United States would normally be celebrating victory in Europe as well, but I read earlier in the week that perhaps Donald Trump now prefers to think simply about victory, losing the sense that the transatlantic relationship mattered vitally in World War I and in World War II. I hope that the United States remembers that. We certainly do, and it is vital that as we think about the future, we still work closely with our partners and allies in the United States.

We are celebrating VE80—the 80th anniversary of victory in Europe. We might have celebrated the 75th anniversary had it not been for Covid. If we had been celebrating in 2020, “celebration” would probably have been the correct word. We may also have said “commemoration”. Would we have talked about “remembering”, as the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, suggested? I am not so sure.

In 2025, on the 80th anniversary, we cannot simply think about what happened when the allies won, when we had peace in Europe, and a few months later, victory over Japan, because in the last three years we have seen the global situation change dramatically. The Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine in February 2022, the terrorist attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the current situation in Kashmir mean that the world in 2025 is unstable and uncertain.

Yesterday, my new leader—I am a Roman Catholic—Pope Leo, on being elected, suggested that evil will not prevail, and he wished us all peace. In the beautiful service yesterday in Westminster Abbey, the Gospel reading also reminded us, “Blessed are the peacemakers”, and the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of York stressed the importance of peace. That is clearly what we all hope for, yet in 2025 we cannot just assume that peace will prevail.

Those of who grew up in post-war Europe assumed for much of the post-war period that the future would be peaceful. Today, 9 May, is the 75th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, as mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Pickering. That was intended to make war among signatory states, particularly France and Germany, materially impossible. For many years now—over 70 years—war between the signatory states of what were the European Communities has looked to be materially and in every other way impossible.

But war in Europe has not gone away. We saw it in the 1990s in Bosnia, a conflict which I do not think has been mentioned today. There are mothers in Bosnia who are still looking for the limbs of their children who were killed during the war. So, war never went away in Europe, but in the last few years we have begun to realise the significance of peace and rebuilding security in our own region, with the war in Ukraine.

Several noble Lords have stressed the importance of defence expenditure. I realise that the debate today is being wound from the Government Front Benches by the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, not by a Minister from the MoD, but I very much hope that she will take the message that has come from across the Chamber of the importance of understanding that, if we want peace, we nevertheless need to take defence seriously.

As the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, in his excellent opening remarks pointed out, in 1938 we would not have been ready to take on Hitler—we would not have been capable of doing so. I echo the words of many noble Lords that defence expenditure needs to be increased and pick up on the point that the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, raised, about the possibility of a European defence mechanism. As we prepare for what will hopefully be the next 80 years of peace, we need to do so in close collaboration with our nearest partners and allies, on this side of the Atlantic, this side of the Channel and beyond.

Today we commemorate victory in Europe, but we also need to be vigilant to ensure that we retain peace in Europe and can move forward, so that our children and young people can learn about war as history, not as the present.

2.39 pm

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con): My Lords, this has been a powerful and humbling debate. I share the sense of honour that many noble Lords have expressed at the opportunity to take part in it. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough chose a very good debate in which to make her maiden speech, and she enhanced it with her wise and compassionate words; we look forward to hearing from her more in the years to come.

Many noble Lords have shared deeply moving stories about the scars that the Second World War left on their families, from the poignant story the Minister shared about his uncle, Sergeant Major Vernon Coaker, in his excellent opening speech, to those who recalled the heroic example of their forebears from across not just these islands but proud countries across the world. As all those stories attest, no family was left untouched by this worldwide conflict. We rightly honour those who donned uniform and took up arms, too many of

[LORD PARKINSON OF WHITLEY BAY]

whom paid the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom we enjoy today and whose names are etched in stone in every parish of the land.

As well as honouring their memory, we are able—after this gap of eight decades—to give more public thanks than was possible of the first VE Day to those who played their part in other ways, such as the men and women who worked in absolute secrecy in codebreaking, counterintelligence and clandestine operations of breathtaking bravery. We recall with horror the atrocities of the Holocaust, the appalling details of which were only beginning to become known in May 1945. We remember the civilians who dug for victory, who kept the home fires burning and who sat in the biting cold on rooftops—including the Cathedral of Peterborough—to keep watch during the Blitz. We celebrate the vital and valiant role played by our cousins of all creeds and races, from the Caribbean, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and across the British Empire.

The noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, knows of my love for Trinidad, so I particularly enjoyed her summoning up of the steelpan celebrations there. We heard such powerful contributions, including from the noble Lords, Lord Boateng, Lord Sahota and Lord Parekh, the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sentamu, the noble Baroness, Lady Amos, and many others.

We also remember those who contributed to this total war effort in other ways. My great-grandfather Isaac Parkinson was a trawlerman on the River Tyne. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for joining the Royal Naval Reserve and sweeping for mines and keeping watch for enemy submarines. Another great-grandfather, Jim Scott, was a miner and exempt from military service because of the vital importance of that humble but noble profession. He toiled underground with reinforcements from the Bevin Boys, so belatedly recognised for their contribution, as the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick of Undercliffe, recalled.

We remember the Forgotten Army, including my great-uncle Bob, who secured victory in Japan as well as in Europe, as the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, my noble friend Lady Meyer and many others mentioned.

It has been wonderful to hear so many powerful stories being shared, not just by noble Lords in today's debate but in conversations being had across the country this week. I thank the Government and congratulate them on a very well-run week of commemorations and celebrations. I hope the Ministers will take back our thanks to the officials in both of their departments for the work they have done in organising them: from street parties to the service of thanksgiving to the wonderful concert enjoyed by 12,000 people on Horse Guards Parade last night, and by millions more at home thanks to the BBC—a corporation which itself played such a vital part in maintaining morale during the dark years of the war.

I thank as well the many organisations such as English Heritage which, as the noble Lord, Lord Lemos, said are the stewards of our national memory. Across the country, people have marked this anniversary in manifold and moving ways. Over the bank holiday weekend, I was in Ripon, which was bedecked with

hand-knitted bunting and in the marketplace of which was stationed an extraordinary knitted tank that was 24-feet long and modelled faithfully on a D-Day tank preserved at Bovington Tank Museum.

On Tuesday, I had the honour of attending the commemorations at the Tower of London, whose Norman keep not only rose like St Paul's Cathedral as a beacon of hope and defiance during the Blitz, but was put back into use in the war to house prisoners of war. It was a beautifully arranged ceremony, but the most moving part was the presentation of flowers by young cadets from the University of London's Officer Training Corps, which my noble friend Lord Lingfield mentioned, to veterans of the Second World War. That simple gesture, expressed in flowers, reflects a sad past about this year's commemorations: they are likely to be the last significant moment for us to thank personally and directly veterans of the Second World War.

Throughout my life, the obituary pages of our newspapers have been filled with astonishing stories about these everyday heroes. But those stories are slowing, and soon they will stop. Only last week, we lost Cecil Newton, one of the last survivors of D-Day, at the age of 101. If there is any injunction that the remaining veterans would give us, it is to remember, not just them, but their comrades and the sacrifices made by so many, servicemen and civilians alike. As noble Lords have noted, that injunction is more pressing than ever. This has been not just a history debate but a chastening reminder that we live, once again, in an age of conflict across the European continent, and that extremism and intolerance are on the rise.

Noble Lords, and particularly noble and gallant Lords, have made points today of great contemporary pertinence. Just this week, Greater Manchester Police arrested nine people, and seized Nazi memorabilia, after they had celebrated Adolf Hitler's birthday in an Oldham pub. I am sure that I am not the only one to be horrified by that news, or dismayed by the proposal of newly elected councillors to lower the Ukrainian flags that have flown with pride and solidarity over so many county halls under councils controlled by all parties and none. Even in this week of commemoration, it is clear that we have much yet to learn.

The noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and I were both born closer to the end of the Second World War than to today, but that gap grows ever wider for all of us. For children who are born today, even the wonderful commemorations that we have held this week will not form part of their memory. Deeply troubling research by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission conducted last year found that fewer than half of those aged 18 to 34 knew what happened on D-Day, and that one in five young people believes that there no longer any need to commemorate events such as VE Day. There is a generation that needs urgently to know the dangers of extremism and hatred. While there are still some witnesses to history among us, let us all ensure that their voices are heard and that their lessons are heeded.

As my noble friend Lord Minto reminded us, it was in this very Chamber that Winston Churchill addressed the House of Commons on 8 May 1945, the other place having been destroyed by the Luftwaffe in 1941.

Your Lordships' House sat at that time just yards away in the Robing Room. On VE Day, it considered a number of modest but important measures, including the Pontypool Gas Bill and the South Shields Corporation Bill—noble Lords carrying out their duties, as ever, with typical understatement.

Here in this Chamber, however, the Prime Minister came to tell Parliament the news that it had longed to hear. My noble friend Lord Lexden has written about it in the current edition of *The House* magazine. Every seat in the Chamber was occupied. Churchill arrived 15 minutes late, delayed by the ovation that he received from the great crowd in the streets outside. As the diarist and MP for Southend, Sir Henry "Chips" Channon, recorded,

"for a few embarrassed minutes we had nothing to do! Members, amused, asked desultory questions about next week's business as they glanced at the doors behind the Speaker's Chair".

Just before 3.30 pm, the great man entered. In the Galleries, visitors, including the playwright Terence Rattigan, stood and clapped. Members of Parliament "rose and cheered" Churchill,

"and waved handkerchiefs and order papers".

As Harold Nicolson put it, "MPs yelled and yelled".

The Statement that Churchill read out was short and powerful. At the end, he added two or three sentences, seeking to convey to the House his

"deep gratitude to this House of Commons, which has proved itself the strongest foundation for waging war that has ever been seen in the whole of our long history".

As he put it,

"the strength of the Parliamentary institution has been shown to enable it at the same moment to preserve all the title deeds of democracy while waging war in the most stern and protracted form".

After thanking members of all parties for the way in which they had maintained

"the liveliness of Parliamentary institutions ... under the fire of the enemy",

he moved a simple but powerful Motion:

"That this House do now attend at the Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, to give humble and reverent thanks to Almighty God for our deliverance from the threat of German domination".
—[*Official Report, Commons, 8/5/1945; col. 1869.*]

It was an identical Motion to one, he noted, that had been moved in former times.

On this important anniversary, we pray that we may never have occasion to move such a Motion in times to come. But we recall with pride and humility the indomitable spirit of Britain and her allies in the Second World War, and we renew our thanks for that deliverance, as well as our commitment to preserve the peace and liberty that were so hard won.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Twycross) (Lab): My Lords, it is a genuine privilege to close this debate. I thank all noble Lords for their contributions today, not least my noble friend Lord Coaker for his truly inspiring opening speech and all noble Lords for their efforts through a range of organisations and their contributions today to ensure that we never forget people's contributions and the horror of

World War II. It feels only right to be able to come together on this 80th anniversary week to commemorate the end of the Second World War in Europe. I join others in congratulating the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Peterborough on her powerful maiden speech, which focused both on this week and on the wider significance of remembrance.

This week has seen some fantastic events to commemorate VE Day across all parts of the UK. Rightly, veterans have been at the heart of the commemorations, with their voices and their stories being central to events. As my noble friend Lady Amos said, they are now frail but still resolute. I particularly enjoyed meeting veterans at yesterday's concert, including Prince Albert Jacob, who is originally from Trinidad. As the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, said, there are increasingly few veterans with first-hand accounts of the war. I join the noble Lord, Lord Parkinson, in recognising and accepting that this is one of our final opportunities to say thank you, and we do, indeed, say thank you. I agree wholeheartedly with the noble Lord about the power of the stories that we have been hearing, and it has been great seeing our young people across the country engaging with the impact of the Second World War and to see our uniformed youth groups ably supporting events through the week, as highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Lingfield.

I want to thank the huge number of people who have worked tirelessly to enable this week to take place. I have no doubt that it will have been a mammoth effort to pull off such a spectacular programme of events. From televised events to local community commemorations, everyone involved should be particularly proud of what they have delivered as part of a nationwide programme of events. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Parkinson, for his recognition of the work of teams, including the team at DCMS. I also thank colleagues and civil servants at the Ministry of Defence, as well as those working for Westminster City Council and the Royal Parks, who were clearing away barriers and debris overnight immediately after last night's fabulous concert at Horse Guards parade.

Like many noble Lords, I have found the personal accounts particularly moving this week, including those from many noble Lords today. I have not seen the knitted tanks that the noble Lord, Lord Parkinson, mentioned, but I will now look out for them. I urge all noble Lords who have quoted from family letters to make sure they submit them to the Letters to Loved Ones campaign. We are keen to get full recognition and reflection of those stories from across the country so that we can remember.

I am sure that, like me, everyone who saw yesterday's service at Westminster Abbey, which I was hugely privileged to attend, was moved by the sight of Alexander Churchill lighting a candle and speaking so poignantly. Of course, we are privileged to serve alongside two grandsons of our great wartime leaders, the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, and the noble Lord, Lord Soames, whose grandfathers played a central role in our nation's victory. I know that the noble Lord, Lord Soames, is in the Channel Islands today as part of their liberation events along with Minister Peacock, who has ministerial oversight of the wonderful commemorations. It was

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moving to hear my noble friend Lord Pitkeathley of Camden's account of his family's experience of the islands being occupied, of internment and of their unwavering resolve.

There has been significant unity across this House during this debate. We must always remain united in defence of our country and our values against fascism and bullies. This was reflected in the words of His Majesty the King last night, speaking 80 years to the day—to the minute, indeed—after his grandfather spoke to the nation. It was very moving, five years after the late Queen spoke to and for the nation at the 75th anniversary celebrations, which fell as they did during the difficult days of Covid, to hear her words in her wartime diaries spoken alongside those of ordinary people, our extraordinary veterans, evacuees and those left behind. A very interesting point was made on Covid and Covid preparedness by my noble friend Lady Rafferty, and I will write to her in response to it.

As my noble friend Lord Coaker said, on 8 May 1945, the nation listened as Winston Churchill stood on a balcony not far from this building, declaring the end of the war in Europe. Churchill was very clear, however, that although one victory had been secured, the war was not over. He vowed to go “hand in hand” with “our gallant allies of the United States”

to end the war that continued to wage in the Far East. We should never forget that many continued to fight long after VE Day until 15 August 1945, Victory over Japan Day. From Britain to India to Australia, and throughout the Commonwealth, the war continued to wage for many. We will remember this beyond this week's commemorative events as we look to the 80th anniversary of VJ Day this summer.

It was really moving to hear the account of my noble friend Lady Hunter's parents in the Far East, including the extract from her father's letter, and to hear from the noble Lord, Lord Parkinson, about his uncle Bob. As the noble Baroness, Lady Coffey said, VJ Day came after the deployment of atomic bombs, which, as she said, we fortunately have never had to deploy subsequently. The noble Baroness, Lady Meyer, spoke movingly of her father's reluctance to speak about his experience in a Japanese camp. In answer to her point on remembering, the Government are doing a lot of work with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which my noble friend Lord Coaker has recently met. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Ricketts, that we must also remember VJ Day, but we should particularly remember his point about the continued oppression for many decades for all too many people in eastern Europe.

This was a war that took the lives of almost 400,000 British soldiers and 70,000 British civilians. The noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, my noble friends Lord Boateng, Lady Amos, Lord Dubs, Lord Parekh and Lord Sahota, the noble Baronesses, Lady Benjamin and Lady Harris of Richmond, and the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sentamu, rightly highlighted the hugely significant role played by the Commonwealth in the allied victory. Over 200,000 Commonwealth troops lost their lives, whether those in the British Indian Army fighting in the Western Desert, or Gurkhas

from Nepal fighting in Italy. These were troops who stood up for Britain and British values, for freedom, and for a world free of fascism.

My noble friend Lord Dubs and the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, reminded us of the part played by the volunteers from the Irish Republic. We must not, and I am confident we will not, forget the contributions of all those who fought and sacrificed so much.

There was a strong reminder from my noble friends Lord Rook and Lord Sahota that other faiths as well as Christianity played their part in the fight against fascism. Indeed, my father's best friend when I was growing up was a Jewish Polish refugee to this country who flew planes for the RAF.

There were particularly powerful comments from my noble friend Lord Boateng on the role of soldiers, including Joseph Hammond in the 14th Army of Great Britain in Burma, in the fight for self-determination, freedom and justice. I know noble Lords will join me in both thanking Joseph Hammond and wishing him well for his birthday.

My noble friend Lady Amos highlighted the role of Caribbean people, both in volunteering and in fundraising, but also mentioned the racism faced by veterans and the need for us to be honest about the whole of our history. The noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, spoke powerfully about her three uncles who fought and the two who died. It is right that we honour the courage and dedication of all those who played their part. The noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, and my noble friend Lady Kingsmill reminded us of the role played by ANZAC forces.

Although the subsequent period of history also had its significant challenges and conflicts, I will take a moment, like many noble Lords, including the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, my noble friend Lady Kingsmill, and others, to acknowledge the importance of the post-war order, including the stability provided through bodies such as the UN and NATO, and closer European co-operation through bodies such as the Council of Europe, which was mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, not least in bringing together former adversaries to become steadfast allies working in tandem to preserve a sometimes fragile peace in the later 20th century, and ensuring that the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s were not repeated. The noble Lord, Lord Bates, highlighted the importance of prosecuting war crimes. I will pass on his suggestion to the FCDO.

As powerfully outlined by the noble Earl, Lord Minto, in his opening remarks about the days leading up to VE Day, the Holocaust remains one of the darkest chapters in human history, targeting the Jewish community and murdering 6 million people. The Government stand with the Jewish people across the UK, today and always. It is important, as was noted by other noble Lords, to remember that the Holocaust also targeted those from a range of minority groups, including, as the noble Lord, Lord Shinkwin, reminded us, those with disabilities, and, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hunt of Bethnal Green, reminded us, gay people. They were all persecuted by the Nazis, as were the Roma people and trade unionists. This must not be forgotten, and

the Government will do everything to ensure that present and future generations remember, through our continued support for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust memorial adjacent to Parliament.

The noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, rightly highlighted the importance of younger generations learning about war and the role of schools and museums, including the Imperial War Museum, in doing this. The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, also highlighted the importance of education. The curriculum review and the importance of educating our young people was referred to by my noble friend Lord Boateng and the noble Earl, Lord Attlee. As noble Lords are aware, the DfE is seeking to deliver a broader curriculum. The intergenerational storytelling we saw this week highlighted the importance of such a review to ensure that young people learn from our shared past. My noble friend Lord Berkeley noted that not everything in our country's history is palatable. I assure my noble friend that I learned about the Boer War and British concentration camps at school, and it is right that we tell a rounded story.

At the heart of this week's events have been veterans, and this Government are determined to support veterans, both now and in future. I echo the noble Baroness, Lady Hunt, in paying tribute to the memory and work of the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton—in particular, in this context, his independent review into the experience of LGBT veterans serving between 1967 and 2000.

The fight for freedom is a constant fight, highlighted by the illegal invasion of Ukraine. This aggression cannot be tolerated, and this Government stand with Ukraine as it defends its freedom, as the previous Government rightly did too. As the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, said, war has changed and is now aimed almost entirely at civilians. It is also true, as he said, that peace is not built on temporary foundations.

The noble Earl, Lord Dundee, also highlighted current conflict. I assure the noble Earl that the Government will do everything we can to resolve conflict. In relation to Sudan, which the noble Earl mentioned in particular, the UK continues to work with our UN Security Council partners to galvanise council action on Sudan. This includes securing a UNSC press statement on 17 April which called for the end of hostilities in El Fasher and full implementation of Resolution 2736.

A number of noble Lords raised the importance of defence spending, including the noble Baroness, Lady Porter, the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup, the noble Lord, Lord Shinkwin, the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, and others. There is clearly a danger in not rearming, and this Government are very aware of that and are taking action. As noble Lords will be aware, the Prime Minister set out his commitment to increase spending on defence to 2.5% of GDP from April 2027, with an ambition to reach 3% in the next Parliament. The UK is determined to step up and meet this pivotal moment of global instability head on, with a commitment that will see the biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the Cold War.

Nobody could have been left unmoved by the stories from Members across your Lordships' House—stories that bear repeating and remembering, although I will not be able to repeat all of them, and nor should I. I was particularly struck by my noble friend Lord Davies of Brixton's point about how many people did not want to talk about their experience, so it is right that we use our voice to tell their story. It was particularly moving to hear from my noble friend Lord Griffiths that not all relationships survived reunion, and I think we forget that at our peril. I have known my noble friend Lord Coaker for 25 years, but I have never before heard about his uncle's death—one of too many young men lost all too early.

My noble friend Lord Dubs talked movingly about his experience of VE Day in Manchester, his memories of the ATS women marching in Hyde Park and the horror of hearing of experiences in the camps, no doubt all too familiar to the father of my noble friend Lady Ramsey. I agree with my noble friend Lord Dubs that we should give credit to Germany for how it faced up to its past. I found particularly moving the final point from the noble Lord, Lord Carter, about his mother's friendship with a German mother who had lost a child.

As someone with very close Norwegian connections, I was particularly grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, for speaking about the role of the UK in supporting occupied Scandinavian countries in their resistance efforts and in the liberation of those occupied Scandinavian countries. Clearly, Denmark and Norway still feel that gratitude to this country.

I thank my noble friend Lord Lemos for his work at English Heritage and for reminding us of the history of the Cenotaph, in making sure that we remember the fallen. I look forward to hearing more about his work when we meet in the near future.

I enjoyed the recollection from the noble Lord, Lord Howell, of his father's role and his desk in the war rooms. I am particularly grateful to my noble friend Lord Bassam for highlighting the role of women auxiliaries in the fire service, as it gives me an excuse to say that I had the privilege to meet a number of those women as Deputy Mayor for Fire in London.

We had a really important reminder from my noble friend Lady Ramsey of the role of women in munitions factories. It is clear from her and from other noble Lords that all those who have them treasure artefacts, family stories and family memorabilia.

It was very sobering to hear the alternative vision of what might have been from the noble Lord, Lord Shinkwin, and it is important to remember how close this country came to defeat and what rights and what people might have been lost as a result.

In preparing for this debate I spoke to my mother, who was born shortly before the start of the war in 1939. She reminded me of how my father described sheltering under the dining room table during air raids in Nottingham. My dad also had a Mickey Mouse gas mask and, like my noble friend Lord Anderson of Swansea, my mum definitely used the phrase, "Have you got any gum, chum?" when trying to get chewing-gum from US soldiers. Both my parents shared the recollection of the noble Lord, Lord Hacking, of the blackout.

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My mother also remembered the sound of laughter and the piano downstairs as her parents opened up their home in Kirkwall to Armed Forces based in Orkney. Some guests became friends for life, but on occasion these were fleeting friendships, with airmen in particular failing to return. Despite the song “We’ll Meet Again” being a hugely iconic and popular refrain played at events throughout this week, all too often people did not meet again. My grandfather was a civil servant in a protected position and, I understand, always felt guilty for not fighting.

From my perspective, I appreciated the focus in the debate on the work of those who contributed at home and, as my noble friend Lady Warwick highlighted, on the home front, from Bevin Boys to Land Girls. My noble friend Lady Hunter reminded us of the invaluable role of women in the SOE behind enemy lines. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham reminded us of the role of Army chaplains, and the noble Lord, Lord Lingfield, rightly highlighted the role of the Home Guard.

We have heard here today the importance of marking the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day. We are clear and united across your Lordships’ House that we must ensure that the legacies of those who survived and fought these wars endure. I thank all noble Lords here today and all those who have taken part this week, including those involved in the parliamentary choir performance on Wednesday, highlighted by my noble friend Lady Warwick. There has been a huge contribution by many people across your Lordships’ House and beyond, across the country, to the commemorative events.

It is right to conclude by thanking the veterans who are still alive today, the soldiers, civilians and all those who fought to secure peace between 1939 and 1945, and our Armed Forces for what they continue to do today to keep us free, safe and able to have debates of this type.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 3.09 pm.